

IN THE SHADOW
OF
LANTERN STREET

HERBERT G. WOODWORTH

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BY
HERBERT G. WOODWORTH



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CHAPTER I

Four o'clock in the afternoon; through the great Cheng-Yang-Mên gate the traffic, congested from both directions, poured into the city and out of it. With like impatience at the delay, with like weird shouts and imprecations, the 'rickshaws from the city struggled to get away and all the crowd from without pushed and strove to get within the sheltering walls of Peking.

Along the roadway, beneath the towering gate with its huge overhanging parapets that guarded the entrance, soldierly policemen kept the lines in order, the white bands of their caps standing out clearly from the mass of bare heads. Each officer wore a sword at his belt and a short rifle slung from a shoulder-strap across his back. These were for serious offenders, but a long black stick lent force to every command, and now and then might be heard its brutal thwack as it struck some poor offending coolie across the shoulders when he ducked to save his head.

Through the dust, above the strange explosive calls of the Chinese, rose the cry: "Ho! Ho!" Each 'rickshaw-man, every chair-bearer and all the crowd

on foot gave way, leaving space between the two streams for a carriage that came hurrying to the railway station just outside the wall. Something in the inflection of that Ho! told them that a Government official approached, and a Government man was a superior being. The sturdy Mongolian pony trotted at his top speed, but the footman, dressed like the driver in a long blue tunic trimmed with red, easily kept pace with the horse, holding with one hand to his bridle, and shouting with his spare breath a full description of the gentleman inside the ornate little coupé.

The Mongolian March wind had been howling for two days, filling the air with a murky cloud of dust carried down from the north, trying its best to cut through the quilted garments of the well-to-do, and stinging with its icy lash the bare backs of the poor.

To-day the sun was shining, and the road lay warm and peaceful beside the grey stone wall where a long train of camels and donkeys laden with skins and furs, pig bristles and soja bean cake from Mongolia drew near to the crowd and to the great gate that opens to the south between the outer Chinese city and the more favored Tartar City lying within the second wall.

Close to the gate, in an angle where they might avoid the crush of traffic, four men squatted on the ground and ate their evening meal thus early, for their day began and ended with the sunlight. The eldest of the four, a grizzled, weather-beaten man who wore his queue pieced out at great length with horse hair, ate greedily from a blue and white bowl, shovel-

ling the steaming rice soup into his wide mouth with a pair of wooden chop-sticks. He held the bowl close to his lips and as he ate his black little eyes narrowly watched a lad who leaned against the wall and waited for him to finish.

A ragged blue cotton shirt and breeches were the boy's only clothing. His face and hands and feet were dirty with the dust of many roads and many days. One foot touched the basket in which he had brought his master's dinner, but his eyes never wandered from the old man's face.

One of the four emptied his bowl, and standing up glanced back to where four 'rickshaws like miniature chaises, their shafts in the air, waited for their steeds to draw them. Then as his glance came back to the boy he spoke:

"Pai-sé is no child of yours."

The old man's mouth was so full of rice that he could not answer, but he darted a quick glance to see if the boy understood that name Pai-sé, for it meant white.

The boy's eyes, no longer fastened upon his master, met the curious gaze of the speaker, and the quick color came to betray his secret. Other boys had told him that he was white but never had he dared speak of it — much less to ask any questions.

"Hsiao (little 'un)," the old man had swallowed his food at great risk of choking, and now his long yellow teeth protruding beneath the curling lip seemed to hiss his commands:

"Kuai chü (cut along now)!"

The lad picked up his basket, joined the crowd that

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turned south into the Chinese city, and disappeared down the broad Chien Men Street.

Soon he had passed the Street of Lanterns and taken a narrow lane bearing east by the shoemaker's shops and the little shops where they made jewelry of silver with the feathers of the bluebird's wing. And then he was out in open fields where were only scattered huts built of mud and stone, windowless huts that told of poverty and disease.

Not far away towered the circular Temple of Heaven, its blue-tiled roof gleaming like a huge sapphire in the sun. The triple terraces of carved white marble upon which the Temple rested looked from where the boy stood like a white streak beneath the Temple. He had known that view of it all the ten years of his life, for he had lived them all in this very spot. And it had seemed very beautiful to him, inaccessible behind its high wall as the moon and the stars. And beautiful as they too were, there had never been any one to whom he could talk about it.

Into one of the dingiest of these huts the lad entered, and setting his basket on the dirt floor called out: "Ya-tzu!"

From the inner room a woman came slowly, painfully stamping her distorted feet, encased in three-inch shoes. Her black hair, glossy with grease, was coiled about her head, and she wore a blue cotton jacket and pantaloons.

"You're back early," she said. "Was he cross?" The wistful look in the tired eyes raised to hers was

the only answer. It was the hungry look of the motherless child, and the childless woman, who had been mother to this boy since he was a month old, understood it. Hadn't she longed for children of her own, and didn't she weep over this sensitive little fellow, kicked and beaten by his master, almost as though he had been her own? Drawing him to her she stroked the close-cropped head.

"One of them said I was white," the boy whispered. "I'm not white, am I, Ya-tzu? Only the foreign devils are white."

"Dogs can only bark or whine when they're not growling," the woman answered. "Now run, Hsiao, and gather your faggots before Hao-tzu gets back."

And as he went in search of firewood Hsiao was pondering on the strangeness of life. Even his name was not a real name; every boy was called "Little 'un" but that seemed to be the only name he had. And Ya-tzu — why, that meant Duck. She must have some other name. Hao-tzu, — well, it was plain enough why he was called the Rat: he looked it, and he acted it. He had heard him spoken of as Tuan; a stranger once said "Mr. Tuan," but Hao-tzu must be his name.

And they were not his father and mother — Master and Ya-tzu they had always been, and even Ya-tzu would never tell him why. White! Oh, no, it couldn't be that he was one of the foreign devils. He had never been bad enough to deserve that.

Faggots were getting scarcer. The bigger boys got

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the best of them. When he came home in the dusk he thought to slip in unnoticed, but the Rat was always watchful.

"Is that all the wood you gathered, you lazy good-for-nothing whelp!" he snarled, and little Hsiao, who knew his moods, crept to his bed on a pile of rags in the corner, glad enough to get along without supper if he might escape the cane. For a long time hunger kept him awake, and he entertained himself with visions of flight into the great wonderland of the Tartar City, where one might see the walls of the inner Forbidden City with its Purple Palace and the most sacred and mysterious abode of the Empress Dowager.

Often had he heard her mentioned in awed whispers, and had pictured her as a great deal bigger and more terrifying than Buddha himself. But how could he take his friend with him if he ran away? Before he had solved that difficulty sleep overtook him, and when he woke the light was coming in at the door where the Rat stood smoking a pipe, and his little friend who lived next door was calling him. Darting by the old man, he entered a yard enclosed by a mud wall. A few handfuls of rice straw littered the ground, and beside them a tiny donkey, his soft grey coat and gentle baby face a pathetic sight to the lad who loved him, and who knew at a glance that the poor little fellow was too tired to eat. Sitting down beside him, Hsiao put his arms about the donkey's neck; the soft nose rested in his lap, and the long ears dropped over his shoulder.

If the donkey had a name, Hsiao had never heard it.

He called him Brother, and knew that the coolie who owned him let him for twenty cents a day.

If the weather was bad, or work was scarce, Brother had a rest, but many a time he tramped under a heavy load all day long without food or water. In a land where men counted for so little and women for so much less, there was no sympathy to waste on a mere animal.

The Rat with his 'rickshaw had gone for the day when Ya-tzu found the two little friends in the yard next door and tossed the lad an extra rice cake for his breakfast.

"You're hungry," she said, and he, knowing that she meant more than that, nodded his head and smiled. Something about that smile even to her dull mind spoke unutterable things. It seemed always to be pleading for him. She had a basket of clothes that she carried with great difficulty, tottering along towards the pool just outside the south gate. And as she went the boy was feeding the rice cake in little pieces to the donkey.

CHAPTER II

An hour later, the housework finished, Hsiao, also tottering, set out for the south gate. Across his shoulder he held a pole from each end of which dangled a deep wooden pail.

The load was heavy for so small a lad, but in China a part of every day's work is the carrying out of sewage and putting it on the land. A sewer to the Chinese is but the wasteful folly of Europeans.

Outside the south gate the Rat had his tiny garden patch, sheltered by a rude wall. Here radishes, greens and cress were growing even in March, and here Hsiao worked five or six hours every day.

In a muddy pool green with filthy scum some women were washing clothes, beating them at the water's edge with a short, thick club. Ya-tzu was one of these, and beside her a neighbor chatted as she dipped her basket of vegetables again and again in the foul water.

Four hens occupied a corner of the garden, and had the luxury of an enclosure almost four feet square.

One of them had contributed an egg to her master's store, and Hsiao picked it up and held it tenderly while he pondered the question of appropriating it to his own uses. No one knew that the egg was there; he was hungry, and it would be so easy to break a little hole

in the shell at each end, and how good it would taste! Easy enough to bury the shell—but Ya-tzu had taught him that people must be honest, that was the most important thing of all; we should always be afraid to turn our backs to each other if it weren't for that.

He looked over to where she crouched at her work, folding the wet garment on a flat stone, and beating the water out of it. She had taught him to read, though the Rat called it a waste of time. No, he couldn't eat the egg; it was her egg, and he placed it carefully in a safe place till he should go home to dinner. Perhaps she would mix it with rye flour and bake it in a dish for both of them.

He was raking where the earth was dry when some one called "Hsiao!" It sounded like See-ow for the initial letter H only intensifies the hiss of S. Looking up he saw Li, who lived in a shanty on the edge of the pool. Li was the oldest of twelve children; he was nearly thirteen, and his father was so rich he had three wives. Li was letting his hair grow so that he might develop a queue.

"I ran away from the factory," he said. "The old man went to buy more brass and I ran—to-night I'll get—I've found an egg!" and leaping the wall he pounced upon Hsiao's treasure. But when he tried to get out again with it, that was another matter.

"Put it down, Li, and don't break it," Hsiao commanded.

"One egg!" Li rejoined. "Why, they're only ten cents a dozen."

"Then leave this one for me."

"I found it, and I shall keep it," Li insisted.

"You will not keep it! It is Ya-tzu's egg."

"Oh! a duck's egg! Well, I shall keep it just the same," and Li, placing it on top of the wall, was about to climb over when the smaller boy pulled him back with such violence that he fell in a heap.

Before Hsiao could regain the egg Li was up, his eyes blazing with anger. Screaming like a wounded animal he rushed at the little fellow, who stood his ground manfully and grappled with him. What courage and coolness could do against great odds the sturdy Hsiao did, but after a little, Li, towering a head taller, by sheer weight brought him down, and then over and over they rolled on the ground heedless of the Rat's garden, pounding, scratching, biting, until the bigger boy getting astride of his antagonist, choked him into submission. Then finding a stone ready to his hand he pounded the lad's face till it was cut and bleeding.

Hsiao lay very still and white as Li went out through the gate, but the egg reposed undisturbed where Li had placed it on the wall.

Ya-tzu asked no questions; the egg was a welcome treat and a boy's black eye and other bruises were, after all, only a boy's heritage. Lucky the Rat had not found that egg or it would never have been tasted by the two who shared it.

One trait in the boy's character was revealed in this little incident; he never bore the slightest resentment against Li for his rough handling, only he planned what he would do another time to outwit him. It wasn't enough to be cool; one must be quick to think

and act. Next time they fought he meant to do the choking.

Then came the happiest days Hsiao had ever known. One night after Ya-tzu had gone to bed and the Rat was entertaining his richest patron, a rug-maker, Hsiao heard the terms of a trade by which he was to be let to the rug-maker for a month. The Rat talked glibly of his donkey, and the terms agreed upon were forty cents Mexican ~~per~~ day for boy and donkey together.

The single lamp that hung from the low ceiling threw huge shadows of the two men on the wall; the rug-maker's long thin beard made a funny picture, switching up and down as the man nodded his head. They drank many little cups of a liquor the Rat kept in a stone jug.

The boy could hardly sleep he was so excited at the thought of the great adventure, and as the Rat had no donkey of his own it must be that he was to hire Brother from his next-door neighbor.

Ya-tzu showed no sign of anxiety or sorrow at his departure, next day, but the Rat was there and she was always afraid of him. No explanation was made to the boy.

"I'm going to take you to a friend of mine to work, and mind you work, you little dog!" the old man said, as he came in leading the donkey.

The rug factory was a long way off in the Chinese quarter of the Tartar City. The boy had never been so far from home, and it seemed thrilling and quite grown-up to be taking such a journey.

The Rat trotted on ahead with his empty 'rickshaw,

and the two little friends side by side trotted behind it. There was no luggage — both were wearing their entire wardrobe.

There was no ceremony of introduction when they came to the little yard enclosing the factory, and met the proprietor who carried a rattan cane and peered critically at the boy and the donkey to see whether they looked tough enough for his uses. The Rat seemed anxious to get away — perhaps he didn't care to be questioned — but he waited long enough to assure his patron:

"They're not very big, but they'll stand no end o' work, and they don't need much to eat."

This point pleased the patron so heartily that he hit the donkey across the hind leg to test his temper.

The Rat showed his teeth in a grin of satisfaction, and without even a word to the boy was gone.

"Follow me now and be spry," said the rug-maker, and led the way into a low shed where bales of rugs in burlap were piled high, and in a great bin were countless balls of yarn, blue and grey, red and brown, yellow, black and white. Next to the bin was another enormous pile of yarn, undyed, and this in big bundles the rug man and one of his coolies began loading upon the donkey's back, tying it on with ropes, and balancing the load with great skill. When they had finished, the gentle face of patient little Brother looked out from under a mountain of yarn — enough to tax the broad back of a dray horse.

The boy was then instructed how he was to find the dye works situated seven miles north of the Hsichi-

men Gate on the road to Tientsin. The rattan cane administered one sharp reminder to look alive, but neither the indignity nor the smart of the blow impressed the lad, and then they were out in the road, the rug-maker watching them out of sight to see that he got his money's worth for forty cents in Mexican silver.

Outside the city gate Hsiao untied the ropes to transfer a great pack to his own shoulders, and little Brother felt the difference and showed it in his gait, taxing the lad to keep pace with him. Four hours later they reached the dye works where a very fat man proceeded to carry the bundles up a flight of stone steps into the works. Brother, relieved of his burden, began to graze along the roadside where so little grew that only a donkey or a goat could have found it, and Hsiao following the fat man into a low-studded room, all stone, saw the vats in which the dyer, with vegetable dyes, the secret of which was his fortune, transformed the fibre of common wool into yarns of soft but enduring hues.

Answering the lad's admiring gaze the dyer explained: "Some use the cheap colors of chemicals that come across Thibet from Germany. They do not hold. They fade out in the sun. Pah! Have they no honor, no pride — these? My color, it is all fast. As the green of the leaf; — you come from the city, lad. Are you not hungry?"

The boy nodded his head, and looked into the eyes of this strange man who cared whether or not boys were hungry. The dyer looked back at him with more

than a casual curiosity, started to speak, then checked himself, and beckoning the boy to follow, went through a narrow passage that brought them into a kitchen where two women were serving a steaming mess of rice and curry, ladling it out in bowls from a great kettle over the fire.

Many children were toddling about the room, all too young to work, and Hsiao knew that two wives must be the dyer's portion of domestic happiness. One of the bowls came to him and he longed to share it with little Brother out there in the road, but he feared to offend these good people who had been so generous. It would never occur to them to waste anything on an animal. While they were eating he heard the dyer say something that sounded strangely like white, and the women looked at him.

About two in the afternoon the donkey was loaded almost as heavily with colored yarns for the return journey, and once more Hsiao waited until they were out of sight of the dye works before taking on his own back a portion of the load.

A meagre supper awaited them on their return, but the corner of the shed afforded a soft, warm bed where many burlaps were piled, and there they lay very close, Hsiao's arm thrown protectingly over Brother's neck.

Every fair day, and rainy days are few there, the two little friends made the same long journey, and always the dyer and his wives were kind, and there was much of interest to see along their way, especially inside the Tartar City.

It was all so much finer than the Peking he had

known, so much cleaner, and the Legation Quarter fairly stunned him. Were these the houses of the foreign devils! Why speak with contempt of people who lived like this! But he dared not even mention the thought except into the faithful ear of Brother. So it was that the lad returned home, when his month was ended, far wiser, as became one who had travelled and seen the world.

From that time dated his all-absorbing desire to learn. He lost no opportunity to read whatever came within his reach, and so it was that he heard of the vast and wonderful Examination Halls of far off Nanking where the scholarly might try by competitive examinations to rise to the dignity of mandarins. That was in his twelfth year when suddenly all his life was changed.

Ever since his return from that month at the rug-maker's he had overheard scraps of argument between the Rat, who wanted to make more money out of him, and Ya-tzu, who pleaded that she had need of him at home. But the Rat always had his own way, usually by force, and when that was not possible, by cunning. Twelve hours' work each day was not enough return for the boy's board. "He must learn a trade to support me in my old age," the Rat declared, and that day he was apprenticed to the rug-maker at five dollars a month, the pay to begin after a year's instruction in the art, and free board to offset the beginner's labor.

The factory was a high wooden shed in the same yard where Hsiao had spent his nights during that ad-

venturous month, but he had never been allowed so much as a peep within its mysterious doorway.

The Rat had come with him, as before, so as to make delivery in person to the rug-maker, and when they had turned the first corner from home, the boy had looked back and seen Ya-tzu, leaning against the door-jamb and trying to smile as she waved him a farewell.

There was no floor in the shed, and the damp earthy smell, together with a subdued light that resembled twilight, gave the impression of being in a cellar.

These conditions he learned later were favorable for the rugs in process of manufacture.

A row of boys sat close together on a bench, facing a huge frame upon which was stretched the warp of a great rug. Traced out on this warp in blue ink was the design, and colors were indicated by little marks.

It was wonderful to see how nimbly their fingers tied in the knots from balls of yarn of various colors that hung just behind them from a rack.

While the two men talked in a low tone Hsiao was at liberty to watch the boys, not one of whom turned from his work so much as to glance at them. One boy in cutting the threads dropped the thick knife, and the rug-maker who saw everything, cut him across the back of the neck with his rattan cane. Without a start or a sound the boy kept on with his work. Hsiao thought they all looked pale and wished the Rat had put him out on a farm, anywhere but in this quiet, gloomy shed.

When the Rat was gone the rug-maker directed Hsiao to a bench by himself where he proceeded to

teach him the process, rapping his knuckles with the stick every time the boy failed to tie his knot at the first trial.

"How long does it take you to make a square yard?" he asked one of the boys that night when, after their scant allowance of supper, they had huddled in a corner of the factory to sleep.

"A boy must make one square yard in thirty days, ninety threads to the inch," the boy told him, and it seemed to him then impossible.

Yet in a very few weeks he was doing the impossible on the bench, crowded in with the others, and under his nimble fingers a beautiful rug was already taking shape.

When darkness came his eyes ached so that he could hardly keep them open, and it was not reassuring to learn that a boy seldom kept at it more than three years because his sight failed.

In a land where no one plays after the age of seven, and there is no day of rest, every poor boy expects hard work. It wasn't that which Hsiao found unbearable; it was the sudden complete check to his thirst for knowledge. He could not endure the thought of wearing himself out with these tired, pale companions. The next step was a firm determination to end it.

An old man now had the job of carrying to and from the dye works. He drove a big white mule in a two-wheeled cart with wooden axle and a blue canvas top, and rode sitting on one of the shafts.

The only chance of escape lay in slipping out in the early morning with the old man and his cart.

Hsiao waited for a cloudy day so as to elude the watchful eye of his new master, meanwhile confiding to no one any hint of his plans.

The wall about the yard was too high to scale, and none but the rug-maker himself had the key to the gate. When the day came it was so cold and foggy in the yard that Hsiao could hardly see the white mule being hitched to the long shafts. The teamster kept up a steady flow of conversation with himself about the absence of proper light, and the wooden axle creaked as the load was adjusted to the saddle-girth. The boy crept along by the wall close to the gate. He knew the rug-maker would stand at the left side as the cart went out, so as to face the teamster who rode on the left shaft. As the gate swung open he glided to the right side of the cart, and there, hidden from sight of either man, he walked out. For a mile he kept the same position; then as they passed the end of Legation Street, he left his shelter to explore once more the stately precincts of the foreign devils.

Barefoot, half-clad, hungry, without even a "cash" to his name, ignorant of any tongue but the Chinese of the coolies, he was going to begin life on his own responsibility.

CHAPTER III

In front of the British Legation a yellow pony pawed the ground, anxious to be off in spite of all the luggage piled on top of the carriage, in spite of the footman standing at his head and the driver on the box flourishing a long lash whip, in spite of the three gentlemen excitedly talking at the carriage door. Plainly the yellow pony was not curious as to their conversation, or he would have known that the driver would not cluck and snap his whip until "that miserable, dawdling rascal showed up."

That is what the English gentleman was saying, and the young Chinese gentleman looking up and down the street was evidently expecting to see the miserable dawdler coming on the run. The third man wore a beautiful coat of silk brocade, and, from the red button on top of his black silk cap, one knew that he was a mandarin of some importance. He held the young man by the arm and said nothing. A pair of heavy black goggles concealed his eyes, and Hsiao, watching just across the street, thought they made him look like an empty warehouse.

Suddenly the young man spied him and beckoned. The boy crossed the road with the catlike agility of his class when prompted by visions of ready money.

"Boy, make catchee plenty work?" said the

Englishman in a poor attempt at Pidgin English. "He does not understand," the young Chinaman explained, whereupon he proceeded to question him in his own tongue:

"Would you like work? A very good job for an honest, faithful lad?"

The boy smiled his joy at the very thought, and showed his white teeth, as he answered: "Yes, highness."

"And would your father let you go far from home with his excellency here?" indicating the personage with the goggles.

"I have no father, no mother, just myself," the boy answered.

"Does he look bright?" the mandarin asked.

"Unusually," the other answered, "but a ragged little urchin as ever you saw."

"Then I must take him and be off or I'll never catch the boat."

The mandarin hurriedly entered the carriage, the young man slammed the door, and the yellow pony, released by the driver's signal, sprang forward to show his contempt for the longest road.

"Follow close," commanded the young man, and Hsiao's glance as he obeyed took in the two gentlemen standing hat in hand while the carriage rolled away.

Once outside the city walls the footman left the horse's head, and rode standing on a broad step behind the carriage. They were going out over the Tientsin road, and presently they came to the familiar dye works. The mule cart they had passed far back

going slowly on its way, but Hsiao well knew the old teamster would never recognize him. The fat dyer was in the door of the works gazing down the road, and some of his many children were playing by the roadside, so the boy kept his eyes on the ground as he ran by. There were so many boys in ragged blue cotton the dyer would probably never notice him.

Then came a hill and the road was stony, so the tireless yellow pony was forced to walk. The mandarin stuck his head out of the window, and the footman, jumping down, came to the carriage door:

"The boy — does he keep up?"

"Yes, Excellency, but it is rough here."

"Let him ride — I shall need him."

"Yes, Excellency."

After that Hsiao rode, and it was well for him that he did for their journey was the ninety miles to Tientsin, and few grown runners could keep pace with the yellow pony.

On the evening of the second day they arrived, and the boy, thinking his mission ended and wondering what his pay would be, was amazed and thrilled to find himself on a great steamer bound south for Shanghai. The journey was hardly begun.

And now he understood why the mandarin had need of him: he must be eyes for a blind man. And what marvels those eyes were seeing in this their first vision of the great ocean and the monster steamboat, calmly riding the mightiest waves!

Three days more and they had come to Shanghai, a foreign-looking city where tall Sikhs in red turbans

were the police, and everywhere the English foreign devils seemed to be in power.

Here he was fitted out with decent clothes, and from the new master, whom he was getting to know as a wise and gentle man, he now learned that their destination was Nanking whither the mandarin was travelling on a mission so important that the failure of his secretary to appear on the day of his departure could not deter him. Therefore, it was that he had taken up with a stray lad to guide his steps, as poorer blind men rely upon a dog.

A week later found them embarked on a river steamer for the twenty-four hours' sail up the Yangtse-Kiang, and then they were at Nanking with its narrow winding streets, its dense population, its food shops where, exposed to all the dust of the street, rows of ducks, very naked ducks shiny with oil, hung beside other rows of ducks that had been roasted and resembled mahogany well-varnished. To Hsiao there was nothing strange about them, nothing strange about the pervasive smell composite of grease, unwashed humanity and sewage. It was all Chinese, that and the crowded life, the beggars, poverty, disease, and with it all a beauty, an antiquity and a vastness that caught and satisfied the lad's inborn love of such things.

Already he had come to see that his blind master was no empty warehouse, a treasure-house instead, from which he was daily drawing stores of learning, and the mandarin's errand was the conduct of the triennial examination about which Hsiao had read.

Great was the boy's surprise to find the Examination Halls a yard surrounded by very high stone walls, and divided into little streets or alleys formed by rows of tiny stone huts or stalls, open in front and only about three feet deep, three feet wide and four feet high. And there were twenty thousand of these stalls!

From the kind mandarin he learned that of the great host who came from far and near bringing each his own bedding, light, food and drink for the three days and three nights of the examination, only one hundred and eighty were chosen to become mandarins. Further he learned that shut in as the candidates were, in such crowded condition, it was not unusual for one or two to die. The examinations were written, and the men were closely watched by proctors who patrolled each alley.

And when the candidates began to gather, a few days before the examination, he discovered that the only subjects required were Chinese classics. None cared about the wonders his master had explained to him as existing in other lands. Was there no interest, then, in the why and wherefore of the great engines that drove their steamships? Didn't any one need to know the marvellous things his blind master had told him about the stars and about ourselves, how our blood keeps us alive, and oh, so many things that are so much more wonderful than what other men long ago happened to write!

That is how it lay in Hsiao's mind when he discovered that it was what the great mandarin had

learned outside of his education that really made him a treasure-house. And this conviction deepened when he saw how little the candidates knew, for he had heard and questioned several of them at the hotel from day to day, and none was like his mandarin. None cared for knowledge, save only knowledge of their own literature. The wisdom which his mandarin expounded, coming from their sort of learning far less than from experience and the ability to reason clearly, was a thing unknown to them and unprized.

"Tell me, Hsiao," the master said one day, after patiently answering the boy's questions; "I find you no street boy as I had supposed; your mind is active, and as sight for my sightless eyes you are to me a gift of the gods — what is your parentage, for they have told me that you are white?"

"I do not know, Excellency," the boy answered, and the master little suspected the blush that spread over the boy's cheek, testifying to his humiliation.

"Surely, surely I am not white! But I never knew father or mother, only The Rat and good, kind Ya-tzu."

Encouraged to talk, he told of his life, and how he had run away to escape it.

"But why, if you had never known better?" asked the master.

"Ya-tzu had given me sometimes a book to read, and then I have seen how differently others live, and one has always the hope —"

"Ah lad, haven't you discovered yet that hope is

not of Chinese origin? Can you not see that it is your white blood that hopes?"

"But, Excellency, you hope, and you make me hope."

"I have travelled much, and I have learned the best things outside of my beloved country. Antiquity we have, lad, and much of beauty and of art. But hope for a nation lies not that way, but along the paths of Science. If I could only make my countrymen see it!"

After that the master seemed to take even greater pains with Hsiao, teaching him to use his own mind rather than stuffing him with facts, and gaining the boy's perfect confidence. Little by little the relationship between them changed with the lad's awakening. Insensibly the menial position gave place to that of pupil and secretary. Hsiao, no longer a servant, became the mandarin's companion, and his progress in all that such a position implied was amazingly rapid during the succeeding months of their stay in Nanking.

No wonder the months flew by unheeded until they had expanded into years. Business relating to the Government kept the mandarin employed along the course of the Yangtse-Kiang from Shanghai up as far as Hankow for three years, and during all that time Hsiao was with him constantly.

Not even the Rat or Ya-tzu would have known the tall bright young fellow of fifteen who came back with his patron to Peking in the early winter of 1899. He was scrupulously Chinese in dress, and wore his hair

in a short queue which he was cultivating with zealous care.

Something had gone wrong with the master. Word had come from the old Buddha, meaning Tzu Hsi, the Empress Dowager, that her feelings were hurt: she had heard with grave concern that her special envoy to Nanking had preached heresy there and at Hankow, urging Chinese scholars to learn other things besides their classics.

The Empress was grieved, and any one who had ever seen her cruel face with its thin, straight mouth, knew what it meant to offend that august Majesty.

This much the mandarin confided on the hasty homeward journey, but Hsiao said:

"Excellency, Her Majesty has but to see you to understand that you are all that is good and wise."

The old man laid his hand on the young man's sturdy shoulder, and so they sat, neither speaking, until long past midnight, while the great ship sped them northward towards home and an Empress Dowager.

CHAPTER IV

A blind man and a boy rode side by side in a coupé that entered from the Tartar City through the third wall into the Imperial City, home of the mandarins.

The guard at the gates recognized the man's right to enter, not through the great central gate, for that was reserved exclusively for their Majesties when, once a year, they drove the three miles along the straight avenue to the Altar of Heaven to make sacrifice in sight of all the people and all their gods. But through one of the side gates their carriage entered, drove straight on till it came to another wall and other gates, and there it paused.

The mandarin and Hsiao alighted, and the carriage went back to deliver at the mandarin's house his luggage, and the news to his five expectant wives that he had been bidden to an immediate audience with the Empress Dowager.

On foot they entered the Forbidden City, crossed the marble-paved courtyard, crossed the beautiful white marble bridge, were stopped and questioned by the eunuchs in attendance at the door of the Palace and finally stood before a red-lacquered chair on a red-lacquered dais, and as Hsiao saw the mandarin prostrate himself before that awful throne, he knew that Her August Majesty, Queen of Heaven, Ruler

of Emperors, was about to appear in judgment. From his position by the door, forty feet behind the mandarin, he too bowed his face to the floor. There was a hushed sound of whispering from a side door; the throne-room seemed very large and cold. Silence that was ominous; and then a rustling of two or three who entered stealthily.

The boy raised his head only enough to see two men with long, flashing swords, who took their places silently at each side of the kneeling mandarin. The red-lacquered chair was empty. He heard the swish of a sword that flashed and whirled for a second, then struck with a dull, choking sound. Something fell on the floor, but he dared not look up until he heard the rustling again, heard it grow fainter, then disappear through the side door. Slowly he raised himself on his knees. One of the eunuchs was helping him to walk from the room — that was all he remembered of it — and his legs gave way under him. Before his eyes was the figure of his beloved master still kneeling, and on the floor the head that only a moment before had held so much of wisdom, of loyalty to his country, of kind thought for his fellow men.

This, then, was an interview with the Empress Dowager! Oh the bitterness, the cruelty of it!

They allowed him to go unchallenged, back over the white marble bridge, and the marble-paved courtyard, out through the gate into the Imperial City; on, heedless of everything except the burning horror of his loss, until he was back once more in the Tartar City,

back before the very gate of the British Embassy where nearly four years ago he had met his beloved Master. He could hardly see the gate for the hot tears blinding his eyes.

An hour passed, and still the boy remained watching with smarting eyes the spot where life had taken on new meaning. And try as he could to see his patron as he looked that day, standing by the carriage door, the only image clear to his memory was of a prostrate form and a head that rolled on the floor.

A fine carriage with two noble horses came down the avenue, and as they drew out of the gate one of the 'rickshaw men passing called out to Hsiao:

"British Ambassador, one of your foreign devils! They will squeal when we get at 'em!"

Two men on foot came out following the carriage. Hsiao recognized the young Englishman and the young Chinaman who bade farewell to the mandarin that day, and told him to follow close. He must tell them what had happened.

Neither of them recognized in the youth who crossed the street the urchin of four years ago. But when he spoke of the mandarin, and of Imperial justice, the tears falling unheeded, they listened attentively, the young Chinaman translating it to his companion. Hsiao had to answer many questions about the stay in the south, and then the Chinaman asked him:

"And what of you now? We need bright, honest young men here in the British Legation. Will you come to work for us?"

And Hsiao who was only too glad of shelter and food eagerly took up with a proposition to work for his board until he could speak English.

Six months passed, and Hsiao, living within the walls of the Legation, was learning much more than the English language. Thanks to the mandarin's teaching, he was very clever at arithmetic, whether computed on the frame strung with beads known in China as the Abacus, or European fashion on paper, and his mind was as alert and tireless as his body.

A few days after his return to Peking he had gone to visit Ya-tzu. He had met in the very door of the hut the Rat just going to work, and the Rat had looked him in the face, and gone on without suspecting who he was.

Ya-tzu was not in the house. Another woman, much younger and much coarser, was in her place, and to his inquiry for Ya-tzu she stood with arms akimbo, head on one side, and laughed:

"If you want Ya-tzu, go down by the pool yonder where she sleeps in her long box."

And there he found the coffin with a few others, and that marked "Ya-tzu" was weather-stained, and must have stood there for at least two years. Soon they would bury it under a little mound of earth. No altar was near it, and no one came to bring food and tea for the departed spirit.

So poor Ya-tzu was gone, and the hateful Rat lived on! The gods, it seemed to Hsiao, didn't manage these things very well.

There came a hot day in June; the men in the office

were discussing the Boxer uprising, a religious protest against foreigners, aided and abetted by the Dowager Empress in her hatred and jealousy of Europeans. Threats and mutterings had been rife for months, and many of the Boxer troops were quartered within the Forbidden City, a fact officially denied by the court. And the argument of the men in the office was: why should this be, when the Empress had expressly published her liking for English and Americans?

A Chinese runner came in, breathless and excited: "I saw a sergeant of the Imperial Guard," he panted, "stop the sedan chair of the German ambassador and fire point-blank at him. The bearers ran — a crowd gathered,— they swear death to all foreigners. They will burn and kill — all!"

Hsiao, listening, thought how strange it was that he no longer could side with those who vowed death to the foreigners — no longer foreign devils.

In the weeks that followed, the Boxers, emboldened by the old Buddha's support, committed many outrages. The lives of Europeans were not safe, and so gradually assembled within the strong high walls of the British Embassy all British and Americans including the American ambassador and all his force.

From the Forbidden City, separated only by an open space of three hundred yards and the moat surrounding its wall, it was easy even for the antiquated Chinese cannon to fire shots against the walls of the Legation. What few troops were attached to the British and American Embassies stood under arms ready to repel any direct assault, and Hsiao without

a pang saw these foreigners returning, as best they could, shot for shot. He knew well enough that all their lives were in grave peril. He knew that the Imperial forces were already joining with the Boxers to kill all foreigners and henceforth exclude them forever from China.

And yet to his own danger he never gave a thought. His life had been held of little account until the mandarin had changed everything, and now his one thought, dwarfing all else, was that his good, kind, noble friend and teacher was gone.

No, let them fire back into the Dowager Empress's palace itself. Let them kill her, cruel, unjust as she was — he would never lift a finger to prevent it.

There was a shortage of food for so many as were quartered in the Embassy, and daily he heard discussion of the danger that the Chinese soldiers would rush the walls. There were weeks of anxiety and terror; the guns from the Forbidden City had battered a great gap in the wall and soldiers worked frantically to repair it.

Then "Tientsin" was whispered from one to another, and the boy learned that an army of foreign allies had landed at Tientsin and were already marching on Peking. Meantime the Chinese soldiers were preparing to annihilate "these contemptible invaders," as the old Empress and her counsellors told them they could easily do. When they came, however, the Chinese ran like rabbits for their holes, and in a very few days the allied army was encamped, some in the gardens about the Temple of Heaven, some in the

enclosure of the White Marble Pagoda, others in parks all about the outer city. The Dowager Empress had fled to the north with the young Emperor in a mule cart, and both were disguised as peasants.

Hsiao, privileged now as a clerk in the British Embassy, went on various errands to the officers of the different forces. He saw how the Japanese were wantonly mutilating the beautiful marble Pagoda carved with such skill and care centuries ago. One day on a visit to the German headquarters he saw them carrying off to ship to Berlin some of the beautiful bronze apparatus from the Astronomical Observatory on the city wall — useless for scientific purposes but very dear to the people because of the five centuries it had stood there in a conspicuous angle. And Hsiao, whose only moral training had been Ya-tzu's lessons in honesty, shocked at such immorality by those in authority, contrasted their conduct with that of the English and Americans, and learned that there were differences in foreigners.

CHAPTER V

Lazily floating out over the tops of low pines near the Altar of Heaven, the Stars and Stripes marked where the Americans were encamped. In a tent open on all sides to encourage any draft of air, an officer sat at a little table.

To judge by the clutter of papers before him there was work to be done, but the officer's eyes were not on his work; his thoughts had gone back nearly seventeen years to the time when, still a student at West Point, he had come here to Peking with his father and mother.

Never since then could he think of Peking without a pang. As he sat there in his tent, he could see once more the fair-haired English girl, his little sister's governess. The very sound of her voice came back distinctly. She was of good family and showed her breeding, but it wasn't this that made him fall in love with her. They were both very young — yes, and very ignorant; that was the only excuse for them. He recalled with a shudder some of the notes he had slipped into her hand; with an indulgent smile he thought of stolen interviews. Then he buried his face in his hands at the horrid climax of it all. Thank God, he had never suspected her reason for leaving his mother's employ, just before they started for home.

Why should she prefer a Missionary School to him! Fickle he had called her at their last hurried meeting, and her only reproach he had seen in her eyes. Even then he had not suspected.

And then, many months later, when he was back at West Point, a letter, very brief, had come.

"Our little boy," it told him, "has been given to a kind and gentle *amah* (nurse) who was connected with the hospital, to bring up. You couldn't expect missionaries to keep me after discovering my condition, so the day I was able to leave the hospital I had to find work or we should have been objects of charity. I am going back to London with a charming family, and as soon as I can save up enough I shall go back for my baby."

It was postmarked Hong Kong. Fear, Prudence and Honor fought a terrible combat in full sight of the young father's soul when he had read it.

In the end he had sent her a thousand dollars, most of it borrowed, to the address she gave him in London, but after writing half a dozen letters and tearing them up, the poor little note accompanying his draft was painfully formal and cold. No answer to it had ever reached him, and oh, how many times had he reproached himself! Why should he have blamed her! Had Fear, after all, won the fight?

How it all hung over his head to-day as though it had happened yesterday!

And then, little by little, it had faded, blotted out by the excitement of life to a boy of twenty-one. Many times he had thought of her, thought of that

mysterious child,—growing up a Chinaman, or long since taken home by his mother?

When the child was three years old he had written to the London family for news of their governess, and then had come the reply that she had died in a hospital following an operation; that she had never recovered from some sickness which had befallen her in China, and that her own family had been with her at the last.

That was all — and now, after all these years, duty had brought him back to Peking. No wonder that, as he sat there in his tent, his thoughts were not with his wife and children at home in America, but with that baby left all these years to make his own way in the world while his father lived in the luxury of inherited wealth and an assured position in the army. His only clue was the information in that first letter that the amah was in some capacity employed by the hospital. Peking did not abound in hospitals; it would be a simple matter to find the record of her case. Hot as it was, he put on his cork helmet and called a chair. After sixteen years there was no time to be lost.

A tall slender boy passed him at the camp barrier. The boy had a message from the American ambassador to the Colonel. Major Hugh Thornton, riding out in his chair, noting the boy's straight, regular features and clear bronzed skin, said to himself: "Handsome boy that. Too handsome for a Chinaman."

Meantime a little group of officers were enjoying themselves, chaffing the boy over his very limited knowledge of English.

"What is your name?" one asked him.

"Hsiao only name," he answered. Thus much he understood.

"C. Howe!" rejoined the officer, imitating the boy's pronunciation as well as he could.

"Well, what does C. stand for?"

Hsiao shook his head; he didn't understand.

"What name C?" persisted the officer.

Hsiao thought a minute. Then C. suggested the name of the American Ambassador.

"Conger," he said.

"Ah, now we have it, Conger Howe. Well, that's some name for a young Chinaman to carry." Whether it was or not, it was the name that Hsiao carried ever after, for he became a great favorite with officers and men, thrown with them constantly and trusted with many an important mission between the embassies and the troops, and Conger Howe he was to all of them.

On one of these errands he encountered Major Hugh Thornton, a typical soldier, in the service because he loved it. The major had found at the hospital that the amah's name was Ya-tzu, and where she had lived, and even found her coffin in the field, but the clue had led no further.

Face to face with the boy whose beauty had struck him before, he felt shy about questioning his antecedents, but something deeper than curiosity impelled him and he was determined to know.

How simple it all seemed afterward; the boy's spirit rebelling against slavery in the rug factory; his bright,

handsome face winning him the golden opportunity to go south with the mandarin.

And as the boy's father thought it out, how natural that the mandarin, a gentleman and a scholar, should have recognized the fine spirit and quality in the boy! But what good fortune that his son had fallen into the hands of so noble a man!

Was it the four years with the mandarin that had made this boy a gentleman—or was it good blood showing itself? This the father pondered looking into his son's eyes. Dark as he was, he was strikingly like his mother.

Day by day the friendship between them grew to intimacy, but Major Thornton, no longer an impetuous youth, had not revealed himself as the boy's father, reasoning that the complications to follow would be of no help to any one. A way must be found without betraying his secret even to his own son.

Through the autumn and winter some of the troops remained, and Major Thornton with them; meanwhile he had elaborated a scheme that seemed reasonable.

One day the colonel sent for Conger Howe, who now spoke English fairly well, and asked him:

"Do you want to know who were your father and mother?"

"Yes, Colonel, very much I have wished to know since a small child."

"You know that you are not Chinese?"

"Sometimes they have said so; and then I felt ashamed. To-day, knowing so many, I do not feel disgrace."

"Thank you," the colonel said, and the boy bowed his head in acknowledgment. Irony was too indirect, and the new language had so many strange idioms.

"Your father was an American and a gentleman," the Colonel continued, "and your mother an English lady who died when you were a baby. China is not even now a comfortable place for foreigners. It was less so then, and the young couple got separated, leaving their baby in charge of a woman who had been highly recommended. Probably the father also died. At any rate nothing was heard of him. And now Major Thornton, who knows your story and is very fond of you, wants to adopt you as his son, take you to America and give you every advantage. He has a lovely wife and two little daughters, and I know you would be very happy with them."

"Adopt?" the boy repeated. "I do not yet know this."

But when the Colonel had explained it he exclaimed delightedly:

"Ah! It is then so much like my dear mandarin!"

Hsiao had by this time quite lost his Chinese name, and Major Thornton readily adopted that which chance had brought to take its place. Conger Howe was a good name, and it had also a reason for being. The boy had come to live with his father and they talked daily about America which to Conger was a painfully new country.

"Even our Emperor Chun had been in his great tomb in Nanking a hundred years when your land was discovered. And Chun was only Ming Dynasty."

The boy shook his head so patronizingly over this utterance that the major, laughing, answered:

"But think how much fresher it makes everything in a new country. Here the land, the very stones have been used for thousands of years by millions upon millions of beings. With us all is new — it even smells fresh."

The boy was still incredulous.

"But the traditions," he insisted, "the history, the art, the literature, all these you must lack, and your religion — one little Hebrew god! Even your Rabbi Jesu spoke to no such following as our Confucius; and what is a peasant like him compared with that Prince of India, Buddha?"

"Our Christian religion," Major Thornton explained, "has shown its greatness by the quality of its following for two thousand years. It teaches —"

Unfortunately the brave major hesitated here because his education had been chiefly in things pertaining to war, and the boy caught him up:

"My mandarin has explained what it teaches; one thing in one land, another in another. To us it brings a different story from that which it told in Syria, a religion trimmed to suit the buyer's taste, so the mandarin called it. But ours — have we not sacrificed to our ancestors and to the same gods these many centuries before that Jesu was born?"

"See here, Conger," the major interrupted, "let's drop this religious talk. We don't either of us know anything about it."

CHAPTER VI

"I want to speak to the commander, sonny. P'raps now, you're the commander, yourself."

The boy looked up from the wonderful fort that he was building on the shore and saw standing before him a tall man in sou'wester and oilers. That is, he looked up just long enough to see the tall man who stood with his hands clasped behind him, critically surveying the fort as though it were to remain for ages a national bulwark, instead of disintegrating with the very next tide. And he saw the sou'wester and oilers, and knew that the big man was a fisherman.

The fort was at that momentous stage in its construction when you are just punching the holes through the wet sand so that you can mount the big guns, and poke them out, like real forts. But the enormous boots were right there, facing you, evidently expecting an answer to the inquiry about the commander; so the boy on his knees glanced up again at the face that was almost hidden by bushy whiskers.

He seemed a very serious boy, and spoke deliberately: "The commander isn't here yet, I am the chief engineer. The commander doesn't come till everything is ready for fighting, in case of an attack."

"Oh! I see — well, now it's my mistake, but I thought some one with a funny name would be in command o' this here fortification."

"Why, you see," (the voice was only an eight-year-old voice, and it had in it the same ingenuous wonder and honesty as the wide blue eyes that looked up from the fort) "you must have thought it was Horatio. He has a funny name, and my father used to call him 'Sneeze,' but Horatio isn't down here."

"Oh! he ain't. Well, then it wouldn't likely be him. But your own name ain't quite so common as Charley — leastways, not around here — I heard it not more'n ten minutes ago, and I says to myself I can seem to see that name carved on a tombstone; but hanged if I ain't gone and forgot it, *so quick*."

"Where was the tombstone?" the boy asked, in the same earnest manner as before.

"Why there wa'n't any real tombstone; only some names you can kinder see printed like. Now there's 'Jessop' — I can't imagine that name anywheres but on a stick o' chewing candy. And Puffer has to be on a soda fountain, — seems made on purpose to go there, and Crosse just fits on a bottle o' pickles."

"But my name isn't like any of those."

"Ain't it? Well, it sounded awful solemn to me. What is it, again? I disremember."

"It is Galton Gragg."

"You must be Cap'n Gragg's boy — Galton Gragg! It ain't a cheerful name, any way you can say it. Galton Gragg; no, you can't make it anything but gloomy. Well, Mr. Galton Gragg, I'm bound off for the weirs. Would you like to come along, and see how we catch fish by the cartload?"

"I should like very much to go, but I haven't any clothes like yours to go in."

"And you don't need any, if what you have on can be washed."

The huge ox, swaying slowly, drew the ponderous two-wheeled cart down over the slope of the beach. Two great wooden pins fastened his yoke to the ends of the heavy shafts, and a cod-line, caught over the tip of one horn, served in place of reins. His eyes were very gentle for a beast of such gigantic girth, such mighty shoulders, such broad stretch of horns; and when the fisherman cried, "Haw!" he veered to the left, and then headed straight out, across the wide sand flats, for the weir that lay a mile and a half off shore.

In the cart rode the big fisherman, and little Galton Gragg sat on the seat beside him; and the fresh breeze blew his wavy yellow hair back from the eyes that opened wide in wonder at thus setting out to sea in a great cart drawn by a giant plodding ox.

He wondered what the fisherman's name was. He had heard him called Cap'n Thoph, in the village store where every one went to get the mail, but he had a contempt for people who lisped, and he knew that he could do better than Thoph, though at best it was evidently only a nickname. It wouldn't be polite to ask him what his real name was, but he might find out by stratagem.

"Does the tide ever turn so quick it catches you out here, Captain Soft?"

"Cap'n What?" and the big gruff voice went up

an octave in its attempt to imitate the boy's tone.

"It probably isn't your really truly name, but don't they call you Captain Soft?"

"No, no, boy, 'Cap'n Thoph.' That's short for Theophilus; Theophilus Snow's my name. Gwan, Sunday!"

"Why did you name the ox Sunday?"

"Because he's so damn slow."

"But my mother says Sunday is the best day in the week."

"Well, and this is the best ox in the county. Geddap! He's slow, sure enough, but he brings 'em in. No matter how many's in the weir, you don't have to lose none of 'em. Sunday fetches 'em in."

The boy was silent, trying to figure out whether the simile of bringing them in went with the name also, and Cap'n Thoph didn't answer as to whether the tide ever caught him out on the flats.

Great flocks of gulls soared gracefully on their sickle-shaped wings, and then came settling down in a vast company, hundreds of them, waiting for the tide to bring them their supper.

For miles and miles to the east and west the wet gray sands lay flat as a table, save for the little ridges only a few inches apart that ran parallel with the shore. Pools and shallow channels here and there gave back the blue and white of the sky, and the eel grass lay in soft, dark green patches, cool and inviting, also mysterious and alluring after you had learned that such shaded places often hid the lobster and the eel.

As they neared the weir, the low thunder of the tide

on the bar grew louder and more distinct, the wind freshened and, look where you would, there was the same vast plain of water and sand that stretched away level from your very feet till it touched the horizon. Only, far off behind you, might be seen the sand cliffs on the shore, and a few white dots that must be houses, and one that stuck up in a sharp white point against the background of dark green, and this was surely the church. All these were dwarfed by distance till they seemed like toys. Everywhere else the sand and the sea reaching to infinity.

The fish-nets that made a wall about the pound were higher than the captain's head, and the water inside the weir was about waist deep. In the nets were herring and mackerel left over from the last tide where they had tried to squeeze through only to die there; and now the gulls were flying about screaming and fighting to get them. They even pounced upon the live fish that crowded so thick along the sides of their prison, yet hadn't sense enough to get out where they came in.

"Boy," said the big fisherman, as they came to a stop just where they could see how many fish were caught — "I call you boy because Gralton Gag is such a hard name to remember — do you know what's the matter with them birds?"

"Well, I don't know for certain sure, but I think they need oiling."

For a moment the man stood listening to the cry of the gulls, half way between a creak and a croak, then he smothered a laugh in his beard with one great hand, and said very seriously:

"I didn't mean what's the matter with their voices, I meant that their trouble is that they're hungry. Animals are all like that: hunger keeps 'em right on edge. Give 'em all they want to eat and you spoil 'em. Well, it ain't very different with men. Hunger troubles 'em so 't they're always worrying about it, but for this kind o' work give me a gaunt hungry man every time."

"Are you hungry, yourself?"

"Yes, yes, hungry as a bear, and I ain't got an ounce of flesh on me."

Galton was secretly glad that the captain's clothes were so thick you couldn't verify this statement, for the picture of such a big man being only a bony framework was not pleasant. It suggested a clothes-horse and those things in the natural history rooms that show only too plainly that they haven't an ounce of flesh either, just like bird cages.

The ox stood in water above his knees, when the cart was backed up against the mouth of the weir, and Captain Thoph, waist deep, began loading, picking up the fish on a huge pitchfork and tossing them over the tailboard.

The little boy enjoyed watching them flopping and thrashing about, but it was not long before the turn of the tide brought such a depth of water that he fell back about fifty yards out of the channel, and so on ground two or three feet higher.

When the captain spied a dogfish among his treasures he pursued him relentlessly until he succeeded in spearing him, whereupon the dogfish, accompanied by a choice string of oaths, went sailing over the net, and

landed, much the worse for wear, on the sand outside.

As the fish became scarcer in the weir, and had more room to swim, the process of working was harder. Fewer fish came over the tailboard; more oaths came through the net. Gradually, little by little, the water was growing deeper. Not until it was waist deep did Galton deign to pay any attention to it. Then he looked about for higher ground, but there was none. The long leader or fence of netting, stretched between high poles, led away for a long distance towards the shore. Standing by this he felt that if the water got too deep he could cling to one of the poles.

The great ox now held his head high to keep above the tide which had risen almost to his back. The boy could see that before it got above his depth the ox and cart would be afloat, so he clung to the leader when he could no longer keep his feet and said not a word. It was evident from the conversation that Cap'n Thoph was holding with the Almighty that he was having all he could do to get his fish out.

Another ten minutes went by, and the body of the cart was now level full of fish as the big man, heavy in his oilers and mighty rubber boots, started to climb aboard.

"Good God, if I don't deserve hangin'!" he roared. "Why, I clean forgot ye, boy!"

There was Galton resolutely, silently, clinging to the leader, the water all about him quite deep enough to drown him; but who would actually drown with the big fisherman within hail?

Captain Theophilus Snow hastened as fast as his

clothes would allow to the boy's rescue, and soon had him perched above the fish, and so they headed for the shore again, and the tide slowly rising followed them in, for, when the tide was high, eight to ten feet of water rolled above these placid flats, and no one seeing the bay then would ever dream of weirs or an ox cart a mile and a half off shore.

The small boy made no mention of his perilous adventure, but asked innumerable questions about everything he saw :

"Do the flat fish swim on the edge, like this," he asked, holding one of them up, "or like little rafts?"

"'Tain't really either way," replied the captain, "'cause rafts float right on top o' the water, and they float right down at the bottom of it, but the position is the same."

"But how do they stay down? Things that float are up on top."

"Not everything that floats, boy. You see these fish have been in the water so long they get heavy, what you call waterlogged, and then they float just off the bottom."

This was a poser. Galton knew it was not polite to doubt his elders, but why shouldn't all fish get waterlogged if flat fish did? There must be another answer better than that.

CHAPTER VII

On the beach the fisherman stopped to let Galton jump out, and as the cart started slowly on over the fields to the ice-house, the big man waved his hand in parting and said:

"You're a devilish spunky lad for your size. Some day when the tide favors earlier you must go out again; and then I'll take you to see us pack 'em in the berrels to ship away."

"What do you mean by 'ship away'?" the boy called back, for an ox cart doesn't soon get out of hailing distance.

"Take 'em to the railroad and send 'em to market," came the answer, and Galton Gragg set off up the grassy road to the village, for it was long after six, and mother might be worrying.

Supper was waiting, and mother was watching for him at the kitchen window. The table was set for two — that was the whole family when father was "off to sea," and, after he had had a very hasty wash at the sink, they sat down. If mother noticed the wet clothes she said nothing about it. But she listened with evident interest and amusement to her son's description of "the men with spears that had three sharp fingers on 'em, 'jobbing' for eels in the little pools where the grass grew."

"Do you love the sea, Galton?" she asked. "Shall you follow it, like your father and your grandfather before you?"

"Father said this was his last trip in a windjammer," the boy answered, "but I don't think I shall ever make any except as a passenger."

"Do you expect to go through life as a passenger, dear?"

"Oh, no, I'm going to work to be a — a something or other in a big city like Boston. I'm not going to live always on Cape Cod."

"I see," his mother said indulgently, but in her heart very glad that her only child hadn't his father's passion for the sea. And long after the little fellow had gone to bed she sat at her window, gazing across the rolling fields and the little pond that lay like polished silver in the moonlight. Gently came the rhythmic beat of the waves breaking on the beach; a straggling line of bathhouses stood out darkly along the shore, and somewhere far away on that wide and treacherous expanse of sea her husband was tossing about and trusting the winds to bring him home.

It was a year before the winds and waves finally brought Tom Gragg home to wife and son, and the village saw the big man with deep-set grey eyes and a beard already grizzled going to the post office every day with his proud little son. They were a gallant pair, and of the two the father's pride in his boy was the more noticeable because he was held to be a masterful man aboard a ship, and everyone in Waqua-

nesett had heard how he ended a mutiny with a belaying pin that killed the first who came aft.

On Sundays Captain Gragg sat at the head of his pew in the Orthodox Meeting-house, and little Galton, between his father and mother, sat up very straight on the most uncomfortable shelf that could possibly serve as a seat for human beings and swung his feet for two hours. The warnings issued by the Reverend Jeremiah Driggs of the wrath to come, warnings accentuated by a fist that smote the Holy Bible on the pulpit, meant nothing to Galton. It was a minister's way of doing business, and grown-up folks liked it. They liked also the sound of their own voices raised in hymns of praise which they sang through their noses, facing the choir up in the gallery, but Galton found this very dull, also, and the frequent exhortation to sinners seemed to be wasted on a congregation of saints inasmuch as none but church members ever attended. He hated Sunday exactly as he hated castor oil: without daring to say so, and fully persuaded that in the mysterious ways of Providence anything so unpalatable must be good for you.

He attended the village school, and before his thirteenth birthday had fought every boy in his class and whipped each in turn; and had been flogged by the head master for refusing to tell who took the tongue out of the bell, causing recess one day to last an hour. But nearly every boy and every girl in the school was fond of Galton Gragg, and every teacher had to admit that he was a very apt scholar, which was something unusual for a boy who was first in all the

sports. As was natural, this physical and mental superiority resulted in an egotism that was only the climax of self-confidence.

It was in his fourteenth year that he first showed any interest in girls, and then it was only in one girl who had come to Waquanesett for the summer. She came into "the store" while Galton was waiting for the mail to be sorted, and with the accurate appraisal common to all children, he knew that she was twelve and that the little brother with her was eight.

"Why should we wait, Barbara?" the small boy asked, and Barbara, with a toss of brown curls and a laugh that displayed a very pretty mouth, shot a quick glance at the handsome boy leaning against the counter, and bade her brother run along home.

"Now that I'm here I'm going to stay," she said, and by the merest accident she caught Galton's eye.

"The mail is most generally late," Galton explained, and immediately thought it was rather a silly thing to say to a strange girl. But the strange girl seemed to like it, and rejoined:

"It's awfully stupid to wait round for letters, because usually you don't get any."

Galton shuffled his feet and leaned back against the showcase in an effort to appear at ease, but he could think of nothing to say. Barbara, who wondered why boys were so much more shy than girls, came to his rescue:

"I love Waquanesett,— I think it's the dearest place. Do you live here all the time?"

"I do now," Galton answered reluctantly, "but I'm

not going to. Father says I can go up to a preparatory school and then to Harvard."

"What fun!" Barbara exclaimed, and as her merry laugh rippled at the thought of it, Galton noted that her hair rippled, too, and her eyes rippled in a very provoking little way; even her cheeks rippled, leaving a dimple in each. And when she had gathered up from the postmaster's little window the Wraytons' mail — Galton heard her ask for it — there was a decided ripple in the swing of her skirts as she went out, utterly forgetting him; then at the door she turned and, catching sight of him, smiled the same rippling smile, and was gone.

That was the very ordinary beginning of it, of the boy's infatuation and the girl's admiration for strength, courage, ability — manliness; of the friendship which for two years swung them back and forth from perfect accord to violent quarrel, from the normal healthy friendship of boy and girl to the silly misunderstanding based on jealousy. The jealousy was always Galton's; ownership was comprehended in his idea of affection. And Barbara loved to tease him; what right had he to be jealous? They were only a boy and a girl, and a girl surely wouldn't be foolish enough to tie herself to one boy. Nevertheless she showed a marked preference for Galton, always.

Then, in his sixteenth year, his father, who had prospered and owned a large interest in a tramp steamer then plying her trade in the Pacific, took him out of school in March to accompany him on a voyage from Tacoma to Yokohama.

For once Tom Gragg went as a passenger, and enjoyed a passenger's idleness and ease during the three weeks' voyage, for the tramp was roomy but slow.

At last, one morning, they were surrounded by small, unpainted fishing boats; kites swooped down to touch the waves with their broad, fringed wings; far off towered the lovely Fujiyama, snow-clad near the summit, and the ship slowly crept in between the white and the red lighthouses that mark the breakwater of Yokohama harbor, and came to anchor. Here they were detained by fussy, pompous customs officials, and then they landed from one of the little fishing boats.

Galton in a jinrickisha drawn by a sturdy coolie was not quite sure that he hadn't suddenly become a figure in a picture-book, everything was so unreal: the people all so gaily dressed in bright kimonos; the little stallions gaudily harnessed, dragging their loads on low drays and always following their drivers who walked ahead with the halter over their shoulders; the shops open to the street; and everywhere color, beauty, crowds of little brown people, and the clack-clack of wooden shoes.

In the foreign quarter they were very comfortably settled at the Oriental Palace Hotel, where their rooms opened out upon the Bund and the busy waterfront. That night at dinner Tom Gragg called Galton's attention to a lean bronzed man at a small table with a tall, dark boy. The man, though in civilian dress, looked like an army officer, and the boy might easily have been his son.

"That's a kind of people we don't see so often in

New England," Captain Gragg explained; "it's the English type, and, wherever I've met it, it rings true."

After dinner they had coffee in the lounge, and Galton saw that the dark English boy was much interested in the four tiers of galleries that surrounded the big room, ventilating the whole house through a huge skylight, and furnishing an impressive architectural feature at the expense of much space. Something about Tom Gragg's big, rugged personality, or else the similarity of his also traveling with a sixteen-year-old boy, drew the military man very soon into conversation.

"Fine house this, sir," he remarked, as he lit his cigar at one of the little tables next to the Graggs.

"Never stopped here before, always been to the Grand, something very homelike about this." The dark boy watched him closely when he spoke, as though he thought it was addressed to him, or he might be deaf, Galton wasn't sure which. And when Captain Gragg replied that he had always on former visits been aboard of his own ship, the boy seemed to be studying him with equal intentness.

"Are you staying here long?" Galton asked him, and he didn't raise his voice for fear that might not be the right method.

"We are here now but five days," the boy answered, "and we stay some three weeks or month yet for seeing Japan."

Evidently, Galton thought, these are not father and son. This boy is a foreigner; perhaps an Italian. But he liked him, whatever he was; there was a wistful look in his dark eyes, and a smile that was half-sad,

half-laughing but always sympathetic and understanding. So much Galton had decided that first evening. And Conger, when he talked it over with Major Thornton, and learned from him that these Graggs were typical New England people, declared that he was delighted to know it, for they seemed to him like pure metal—"like you, yourself, my dear major, and my beloved mandarin."

"God's own people, New Englanders," Major Thornton added, "in God's own country."

"So?" Conger replied. "Yet you mean only the little god of the Hebrew people?"

"My! What a lot I've got to teach you," the major rejoined, "and how doubtful you make me of my own knowledge."

CHAPTER VIII

"See here, Conger, don't you know that some things are absolutely wrong, because God has forbidden them?"

The two boys, who had been friends for a month, were visiting the great temple of Kwannon, Goddess of Mercy, in Kioto. They had agreed in their admiration of the building, seven hundred and fifty years old; but to Galton's pure New England training it was nothing less than sacrilege for Conger Howe to say, as he did, that these ten hundred and one huge gilded images of a heathen goddess were just as sacred as the altar and images in the little Christian church. And it only added to his shock when Conger calmly asked: "Which god? For some forbid one thing, some another, and my mandarin told me it made all difference where the gods were made."

"Don't!" Galton commanded. "I feel afraid to listen to such talk. So you really are a heathen yourself!"

"Probably," Conger admitted, utterly unconscious of the enormity of his crime.

When they came down the long flight of stone steps from the temple a crowd was gathered about the great bell of Daibutsu, and a sturdy Japanese was swinging the long boom by which the bell is rung and at each stroke a prayer is registered in Buddha's Book of Life. An official of high rank, indicated by the buttons on his

cuffs, a three-button man, was on his way to the temple, and a policeman set to work with his stick to clear the way for him. One old man was knocked down, one was cut across the face, the crowd fled in abject terror, and with them, all unmindful of any lack of dignity, went Conger Howe as he had gone hundreds of times in China, never questioning the policeman's right to beat him or to shove him aside for his betters.

Looking back from a safe position he saw Galton Gragg firmly occupying the very spot where he had left him, and returning with interest the glare of the official who, seeing in the boy an American, merely smiled indulgently and shrugged his shoulders.

"One thing his heathen training has done for him," Galton thought, as he saw Conger's ignominious flight,— "it has made him a coward." A year or two earlier he would have told Conger this thought, and fought him, if need be, to prove it. But association with his father was teaching him reticence.

In the evening they went to the theatre to see one of the most noted Japanese companies. Their way lay through the Ponto Cho, and Major Thornton, whose jinrickisha was ahead of the others, called back: "The name of this is 'The Street that is called Straight'; it is the home of the geisha." Galton and his father laughed at this sally, but Conger merely gave his usual "Huh!" which was a vocal nod of assent. Galton made a mental note that Conger was lacking the sense of humor. Galton didn't know that his friend was performing miracles in learning a new and difficult language, and that Major Thornton's

translation of Ponto Cho meant nothing to him.

At the theatre all the Japanese left their wooden shoes outside, and the foreigners who paid double price, or one *yen* each, to sit in the rickety little gallery, had felt socks put on over their shoes. To the Japanese there seems to be something sacred about straw matting. Conger, much to the surprise of the others, refused to submit to this extra covering, preferring to remove his shoes and go in stocking feet, and when Major Thornton remonstrated on the ground that he would catch cold, he explained:

"Why, you forget; I never wore shoes or stockings until four years ago."

From their seats they looked down upon a crowded house, the people huddled together as close as they could sit. All the men wore their hats; all the women were hatless as usual; many of them had their babies strapped upon their backs; and many, both men and women, were smoking. There was no music, and when the play began a young woman, carrying her baby on her back, stood close to the footlights and laughed at a serious performance. There was enough of familiar melodrama in the play to enable the four in the gallery, without understanding a word, to distinguish the benevolent hero from the ranting villain. There was even a cooing quality in the tone of one of the women which marked her as the heroine.

At the close of the first act the footlights were extinguished, and in the resultant gloom the stage carpenters were seen at work on the next setting. There was much coughing and lighting of cigarettes in the

audience. Some careless person on the stage overturned a lamp, and instantly the flimsy woodwork was in a blaze.

Conger with keen interest watched the stage hands. Each man seemed to know just what was to be done and how to do it. In a surprisingly short time the fire was completely smothered, and the panicky audience that had fled for the street was slowly coming back, but the house was chokingly filled with smoke. Then it was that Conger discovered that he was alone in the gallery. At the first warning crackle and leap of flames Galton had jumped for the stairway, followed by the two men. This they confessed when Conger joined them, shoes in hand, and Major Thornton was the only one of the three who gave him any credit for coolness; to the others he was only slow.

And all this time Conger in his new and strange surroundings was adapting himself as only a very sensitive nature could, noting constantly wherein the ways of Europeans were superior to the Chinese. Where, as in religious matters, he saw no particular superiority, he refused to accept the new merely because it came with a better civilization, and, though none suspected it, his new friends were not much oftener pained by his deficiencies than was he by theirs.

Something, whether inherited or acquired by the hard conditions of his childhood, had made him at sixteen unusually self-reliant mentally. It wasn't that he felt sure of himself; it was that he was set upon finding out instead of following blindly the lead of others.

Late that night he sat at his bedroom window looking off at the twinkling lights of the city, and trying to accommodate himself to American ideas. "How little they understand," he thought, "how great is the change for a boy who for the first half of his life thought himself Chinese and hated the foreign devils — and now, behold, he is one of them himself! I cannot yet see why this arrogance which looks down upon other nations so much older and wiser because they differ in speech, in dress, in habits. Not one of these has the wisdom or the learning of my mandarin, yet they would consider him inferior. And always Major Thornton preaches to me about democracy, and gets angry when I ask if in his country the uneducated masses are wiser or more trustworthy than the educated few.

"He explains to me that in America all men are born equal, but it seems from what they tell me that they do not remain equal after their first breath of the air of freedom. I cannot see the sense in all this. But why am I glad to be leaving my native land in the company of these over-confident strangers?"

Then his memory went back over his early life, the poverty and toil, The Rat's cruelty and cunning; once more he was spending those golden years with his dear mandarin, and then came back the cold horror of that sacrifice to suit the whim of a merciless, pitiless monarch. Ah! After all, there was something in their democracy.

But how violent the changes he had undergone in his sixteen years: a few months ago he was Chinese, in

dress, in thought, in every aspiration for the future, wholly Chinese. And now — not only acquiring a new language, but new ideals.

"I wonder," he mused, "whether I can ever get so far from China that I shall reverence newness as these people do. And play — why, grown men pride themselves on their cleverness in playing games! Even here in Japan the people play, and how Galton sneered because I couldn't play tennis or catch a ball! Yet I outran him, and in the jiu-jitsu school, though he is bigger and stronger, I threw him because I was quicker. And when I threw him his father and he both began making excuses to explain it."

A while he sat pondering these strange new experiences and their strange meanings. Then came a knock at his door, and Major Thornton had come to talk over these very questions with him.

"Are you sorry," the major asked, "to be taking this great step, the changing over from a Chinaman to a Yankee?"

"Not sorry," the boy said, very deliberately to prevent his earliest error which invariably stumbled over the R, pronouncing it as L, "not sorry, but much mixed. I have been thinking, but it was in Chinese language. When I think new country I feel fear — so much change. Then I remember my mandarin, his life, his death, and I am glad to go to new country."

"And aren't you a little fond of — I mean glad to go with me?" the father asked, for he was overwhelmingly conscious of paternity now, and something al-

most overcame him at every intimate talk to think that he must never tell this boy the truth.

Conger looked at him for an instant as though some suspicion crossed his mind; then he said: "Oh, yes, Major, I like to go with you — very kind gentleman — but I do not yet know my position. My mandarin was blind; he had need of me — but you —"

"I wish to be like a father to you, to give you an education, to start you in some profession."

"But for what is this? Am I to do nothing?"

"My boy, you will repay me in after life when I see you a success," and Major Thornton, much embarrassed by the boy's direct questions, took his leave of him for the night, promising himself more satisfactory interviews on the long passage across the Pacific.

CHAPTER IX

Six years had passed, six years in which many boys had grown into young men, six years that Conger Howe and Galton Gragg had spent in school and college side by side. And now had come their day of graduation, and Galton, who had been prominent in sports, was a marshal and as popular as any man in the class. Conger had won an Honorable Mention and had "cum laude" on his degree, but not half the class knew him. They had "spread" together on Class Day, and together they were receiving the congratulations of their friends at Commencement.

Little Mrs. Gragg, so proud of her handsome son that she couldn't keep back the tears, walked over to the boys' rooms with Mrs. Thornton; they had met but twice before, and on each occasion Mrs. Thornton had tried to let Mrs. Gragg understand that such meetings were a condescension on her part. But Mrs. Gragg was the social leader in Waquanesett — even Mrs. Driggs, the minister's wife, admitted it — and Mrs. Gragg didn't even know that it put you on a higher plane to live in Boston. So the condescension passed by her quite unnoticed; her heart was filled with more important things than her own position.

"Don't you feel very proud of Conger?" she asked. "He is such a dear boy. Last summer when he visited us I told Galton and my husband that I had learned

to love him almost as though he belonged to me."

"You know he doesn't belong to me—in any sense," Mrs. Thornton replied, and Mrs. Gragg glancing at her saw the corners of her very straight mouth drawn down into a firmer negation than words could possibly utter.

"Cold, cruel and self-satisfied," she commented to herself, and before she could think of anything to say aloud, Mrs. Thornton continued:

"The boy is well enough, I dare say; of course I haven't had to see much of him; he has been away at school and college—but here are my two girls, twelve and ten—goodness me! Jane will be coming out in six years, and that foundling has been taking the very clothes off their backs."

"The what?" Mrs. Gragg exclaimed.

"Well, not literally, but my husband isn't rich, and every cent spent on that foundling is so much taken from my children. Have I a car? No; I walk or stand up in crowded street cars because of that foundling."

"I had no idea you felt that way about him," Mrs. Gragg said very quietly.

"Wouldn't you, in my place?" the other snapped back.

"Not if it were Conger."

"Do you realize when you say that," Mrs. Thornton asked in the same icy tone as before, "what it means to my daughters, who are getting old enough to understand things, if they are obliged to wink at immorality?"

"Immorality?" Mrs. Gragg repeated. "Conger isn't immoral."

"I don't know what your standards are," Mrs. Thornton retorted, "but didn't you know that he is —" Here she looked round to be sure that no one heard the awful disclosure and ended by suppressing it.

"But surely that doesn't make him immoral, whatever sin others may have committed!"

"It doesn't?" Mrs. Thornton rebuked her by her very tone. "A child born out of wedlock?"

"Very unfortunate," Mrs. Gragg said firmly, "but not the child's fault."

It was Mrs. Thornton's turn to look surprised. Something in the inflection of that last sentence seemed to put her in a class by herself. Was this the mild little woman whom she had been patronizing by walking across the yard with her?

"Possibly in the country your standards are lower." Let Mrs. Gragg put that in her pipe!

But Mrs. Gragg, little as she was, was not afraid of a dozen Mrs. Thorntons, and replied:

"Isn't it rather stupid of us women to talk about morality as though it only meant such things? No irregularity of that sort, bad as it is, is half so immoral and vicious as selfishness, dishonesty, cowardice, or cruelty."

There was a moment's pause while Mrs. Thornton swallowed hard and relaxed her tight mouth sufficiently to speak:

"And you are a woman! And talk like that!"

By this time they had reached the boys' rooms, and

the conversation was perforce dropped, but the two women had seen each other in quite a new light, and each was outraged at the other's point of view.

Among all the young people present, gaily chattering, laughing, joking, there was something that at once distinguished the quartet over in the far corner of the living-room. Both the boys were tall, but one was decidedly handsome; in face, in figure, in his carriage, there was an air of superiority about Galton Gragg that is Nature's gift to those who are born to rule.

The other was very dark, had a slight stoop from the shoulders, struck you as slender, rather than powerful, and there were two vertical lines between his eyebrows which gave him a puzzled expression. It might be a mental habit, or it might mean near-sight; the puzzled look was there.

The other two were girls, Barbara Wrayton grown into a lovely young woman of twenty whose brown hair and grey eyes still rippled as they did when as a girl of twelve she had first attracted Galton.

"Mr. Howe," she was saying, "I want you to know my dearest friend, Miss Grayley. And why is this the first time I've met you? It isn't my fault. You know, Bess," turning to her friend, "this Mr. Conger Howe and Galton have been intimate for years, but up to now he has been a sort of myth like Aladdin or Jack the Giant Killer."

"It hasn't been through any fault of Galton's," Conger confided, "I don't think I get on very well with girls — after they get beyond ten or twelve, — so I've just kept away from them."

"Perhaps you're above them," Miss Grayley said; "when a man talks like that usually he really feels superior."

Conger laughed. "It isn't true of me. Perhaps it has been until now a lack of interest in the general proposition."

"Then it's up to us," Barbara interposed, "to make the particular proposition so attractive that you'll change your mind. Now, Bess, you see you are to behave very nicely to the gentleman."

"I don't know as I shall," Bess answered. "If he isn't very nice to me, why should I?"

"Because you are a missionary sent out to save that which was lost."

"But I'm not lost," Conger Howe insisted, "at least, not yet."

"Then you don't want to be saved?" Barbara asked, looking mischievously into his face and then away as though afraid of what she saw there. Whereupon, as many another unsuspecting young man had done before, Conger rushed in pursuit: "If you will undertake to save me I think I might try it. But," he added, recovering himself, "are you both sure that you know enough?"

"Know enough?" Miss Grayley was piqued at this suggestion. Good heavens! Hadn't she often thought how much more she knew than the boys who had only been through college! And it must be admitted that Miss Grayley had sometimes wondered how she had managed to acquire so much knowledge and such wisdom with so little study.

They were interrupted in their conversation by Galton's father, big, self-reliant, not so handsome as his son who had his mother to thank for much of his charm. Captain Gragg was very proud of Galton, as well he might be, and it was plain that he was fond of Conger.

"Galton is keen on banking," he said, "now that he's finished his education, but I haven't heard what you want to do."

"Why, you see, sir," Conger answered frankly, "I'm afraid I haven't finished mine, and I should like to study medicine and then practise law."

"That's very stupid, Conger!" Mrs. Thornton had arrived in Captain Gragg's wake, just in time to hear question and answer, and the opportunity to show the captain that she was thoroughly a woman of the world and wiser than most was too good to be lost. If her husband was a fool in his treatment of foundlings, she at least could show that she was not.

"Excellent!" Captain Gragg exclaimed, taking the boy's hand and quite ignoring the lady, "and what then? What are you going to hatch out of such an egg as that? Going into the medical school to see what comes of it?"

"No, Captain," the boy answered, looking directly into Mrs. Thornton's eyes, "I have imposed upon my benefactor long enough; I am going to earn my living as a professional amateur."

Bess Grayley turned to Barbara and remarked: "I don't wonder nobody has ever met him before; he can't seem to utter a single sentence on any topic whatsoever

without putting his foot in it. How Mrs. Thornton does love him! I had imagined she was a sort of mother to him instead of—are these her daughters?”

Barbara turned to see two girls dressed in pink and white, the younger one a smaller edition of her older sister.

“They are pretty, if their mother is a cat,” Barbara commented, “only I wish the styles were more considerate of their legs.”

“Of their legs?” Bess repeated.

“Yes, when a girl is ten or twelve and the lines are parallel, it’s unkind of Fashion to decree that the proof be extended *ad infinitum*.”

Whereupon Bess tried to appear shocked, and succeeded in attracting Galton’s attention so that he begged to be admitted to the secret, and that sent Bess into another series of giggles from which she suddenly emerged to exclaim: “I do declare, Conger Howe was telling the truth. Look at him chatting away as happy as a puppy dog with those two children, and he simply made excuses to get away from us as soon as we were introduced.”

“Is he really shy or just a woman-hater?” Barbara added.

“A little of each,” Galton answered.

“Then, it is my duty to cure him,” Bess asserted, with a defiant glance at the two little girls who were monopolizing his attention.

“Well, what shall you prescribe?” Galton asked.

“Something from our Matthew Arnold, I’m sure,”

Barbara said, "we had it the last year in school: 'Sweetness and Light.'"

"And he stole that from Swift," Galton added.

"My! How learned these seniors are!" Bess commented. "But you're not going to deter me from my splendid purpose." And at that she crossed boldly to where Conger still talked with Jane and Nancy Thornton.

Left alone with Barbara, Galton, who had been waiting for just such an opportunity, said: "Do you recall a talk we had two years ago on the beach at Waquanesett?"

Barbara flushed, showing that she did remember it, but laughed. "We were very young then. And, besides, all I said was that we'd better wait till you were out of college."

"Well, I am out, to-day. You can't get away from it, you have been my girl ever since I first caught sight of you. You were only twelve then and now you're twenty. Of course it needn't be an engagement. I mean it needn't come out—until I get to earning something—"

"You seem to be settling it all very nicely without any help from me," Barbara interjected, looking beyond him to where Bess Grayley was trying her hand at conquest.

"Please be serious, Barbara," he urged. "You will admit that a fellow who has done what I have in athletics, and also graduated with honors, has a right to assume he can earn a living."

"I'm not doubting that for a minute," Barbara an-

swered, smiling her sweetest, "and everyone knows that you have uncommon ability. I'm very proud of you. But when it comes to putting your name on me like an armchair in an auction-room, because you saw me first,—I'm not an armchair, and I'm not for sale."

"But I never intimated that you were. I only say that you and I belong to each other, and no one shall ever take you from me."

"Bess! O Bess!" Barbara called, as though she hadn't heard this speech. "Don't go by us without reporting how you got on as a doctor. Did you cure him, or only catch his disease?"

"He is simply unbearable," Bess declared. "When I could get a word in edgewise I asked the Thornton girls, as an adroit way to sidetrack them, if they knew there was a nice little luncheon in the other room, and he actually asked me please not to interrupt as they were right in the midst of a discussion."

Galton laughed almost too heartily at this confession of failure. Miss Grayley little suspected that the good-natured Galton was glad of company in his own momentary defeat, and Barbara, as placid as a May morning, took her friend's arm and led her off to see just how good the luncheon was. But even as she went, something in her walk—or was it something more subtle?—caught Conger's eye, and for an instant the little Thorntons were forgotten.

It was only a flash, but Galton saw it, and Galton knew that on Barbara's part it was not mere accident. She craved admiration, and in the most mysterious ways she always got it.

CHAPTER X

If Barbara could have heard the conversation over in the corner she might have been surprised to learn that a toss of her pretty head terminated what Conger had called a discussion, and that, in its place, she herself became their topic.

"Don't you think she's perfectly adorable?" Jane asked, with the superlative enthusiasm of her age and sex.

"No, I certainly do not," Conger answered. "But she's a very pretty girl; knows it; uses it; lives on it, I dare say."

"Do you like homely people better than pretty ones?" Nancy asked.

At this he laughed. "I wish I could see more of you girls. Here we are calling each other cousins, and your father giving me everything I have in life,—and yet I see you only at rare intervals. No, Nan, you and Jane are living proofs that I like some pretty girls—not that you are as pretty as Barbara Wrayton."

"Oh, dear, you're spoiling it now," Jane urged; "do let us hear something nice once in a while!"

"Jane, can't you and Nan find some one to talk to?"

There was more in the tone of their mother's voice, and in the look she shot at Conger than her interruption itself conveyed, but her daughters knew her, and without a word of protest they left in pursuit of other companions. Never before had Conger uttered

the protest in his heart against her evident hostility. Now it flared up and was out before he could consider it. She had already turned to follow the girls when this sentence recalled her, and facing about she was confronted with such a scorching flame in the eyes of the always mild young man, that her own lacked the courage to face it, and looked away in terror. How dared he or anyone else to glare at her! She was the one to practise that sort of thing. Why, even Major Thornton never had such audacity! What was it that he had said?

"If I live, Madam, I shall repay every cent that your husband has so kindly spent on me. But he had a perfect right to spend it."

"What is this?" a stern voice interrupted. "Are you presuming to use any such tone to Mrs. Thornton?"

Conger had never seen Major Thornton angry before; his face was very red, and his eyes — if Conger could have seen, the major's eyes were very much like his own.

"I am not presuming," the young man insisted, "but Mrs. Thornton has just sent the girls away from me as though I were some loathsome object. I owe you a great deal, sir; far more than money can repay, but —"

"He merely," the lady said, very bold again now that she was re-enforced by her husband, "showed his bad breeding. He will never be a gentleman. It only proves how wise I was to prevent you from adopting him. He is disgrace enough as it is."

Major Thornton bit his lip, and looked from one to the other. How little they knew that this was harder for him than for either of them! Of one thing he was very sure; Conger had spoken the truth; he had spent his own money on Conger's education and support for the past six years, and was not answerable to any one for his conduct.

But for years his wife had had her way, and this was the only instance in their married life when she had not arranged things to suit herself. She had indeed prevented a legal adoption, but beyond that to prayers and threats alike the major had proved obdurate. He would educate the boy as he had set out to do. She could keep him out of the house, but he wasn't to be turned adrift.

Now in great distress the father only bit his lip, but Mrs. Thornton knew that he was a strong man, that if his will once broke through the thin wall of her own pretension she would never again control him, and Mrs. Thornton for once was silent.

The anger faded from Conger's expression, giving place once more to the puzzled look between his eyes. He loved his benefactor almost as he had loved his mandarin, and he would gladly have taken a whip to his benefactor's wife as he had often seen The Rat treat Ya-Tzu, with the difference that Ya-Tzu never deserved it. Why were things so different in this country? Major Thornton was a brave man and strong, yet he seemed to fear this sour-visaged woman as though he were a coward.

A minute more, and Mrs. Thornton had left them.

Then the father, taking his boy's hand, said: "You will make it so much easier for me if you can control yourself. My dear boy, you do not at all understand our American women; they are not chattels —"

"Chattels?" Conger repeated. "Why, here they are dowager empresses. Even you, my patron, you who are brave with men, have no courage when she speaks."

"I cannot let you talk like that!" Major Thornton commanded.

"Then I will not say it. But it is none the less true." And thereupon the major, frowning and much troubled in spirit, went to find his wife.

Conger was left alone. The puzzled look gave place to one of genuine pain. First the two young ladies, then Galton, the two little Thornton girls, and now his patron — all had fled from him, as from a pestilence. There was, then, something in this land of pretended equality that made one of unknown parentage an object of scorn. Without waiting for the departure of their guests he quietly found his hat and walked out. Hours later when darkness came he was seated on the bank of the Charles River ten miles up stream, carefully reviewing his resources with a view to determining how most quickly he could turn them to such account as to earn his living.

He had always been clever at drawing, not that it had ever been called a talent, for there was no one near him competent to criticise, but his note-books were filled with sketches, and nothing in nature appealed to him so strongly as color. Yet it was not the bold,

strong tones that delighted him; he called them garish and when his friends accused him of preferring his colors muted because he was afraid of them full strength, he only shook his head and did not attempt to reply. Strong colors were to him like noise and profanity — they hurt, and he avoided them. So now as he pondered this question of a means of living, summing up his tastes and abilities, it seemed to him that he must study and procure the beautiful. "I may never produce, but if I procure from their sources true works of art I shall find appreciative buyers here in America." This was the summing up of his afternoon and evening of contemplation; this was his appraisal of his stock in trade; he was too modest to set a high value on his own work.

Meanwhile both Barbara Wrayton and Bess Grayley, if the truth were known, were much disappointed at his failure to reappear, for each in her way had decided to reform him, and neither was willing to admit that she had utterly failed to impress him.

"I don't know why I care," Barbara said frankly to her friend, "but there is something wistful about those eyes that just makes you wonder whether he's hungry for something, and that will not let you hate him even if you would like to. Besides, I'm afraid I hurt his feelings."

"Sounds to me like a crush," Bess commented.

"Don't be silly, Bess. No girl under forty would get a crush on him — but you can feel sorry just as you do for the dog without any collar, and a lost look."

"You mean tail between his legs, running for a place to hide?" Bess asked.

"Come now, Bess, do you think he suggests anything like that?"

"Not to me," Bess answered; "the simile isn't mine. All the same I did want another chance at him for his own sake, of course. He needs guiding and — well, I think I could have shown him a few things."

Finding their mother elsewhere occupied the Thornton girls came back also to finish their talk with Conger. Barbara appealed to them: "Isn't Conger Howe a sort of cousin of yours?"

"He isn't really anything to us," Jane answered, "I mean he isn't related to us. But he's always perfectly dear, and treats you just as if you were grown up."

"And he tells the most wonderful stories about China," little Nancy added. "And when you walk along the street he'd just as soon let you take hold of his hand. Well, you needn't laugh, Miss Grayley; lots of people, unless they are old, are dreadfully embarrassed if you take hold of their hand."

"It is rather babyish," her sister remarked.

"He doesn't think so," Nancy insisted, "and I like the funny way he squinnies up his eyes."

But, in spite of the fact that four such attractive girls were waiting for him, Conger did not reappear, and years had passed before they saw him again.

CHAPTER XI

During those years Conger had been in Paris studying art; his patron being only too glad to yield to the boy's desire. Home was far pleasanter for Major Thornton when his wife had one less grievance to agitate, and, though his duties took him away frequently, it was very important for his children that quarrels should be reduced to a minimum.

So he had sent Conger to Paris, and Mrs. Thornton had prayed that he might never return. Yet he did return looking just the same but having gained vastly in general knowledge of the world.

It appeared that he had brought back the agency for the remarkable paintings of Félix Étron. News of it reached the press the very day of his landing. In fact a mysterious cable had forewarned the press, and a dozen reporters awaited the young man's arrival in New York. He received them graciously, explaining that if he hadn't happened to bring the collection with him it would almost certainly have gone — well, into other hands, — quite likely other lands. All of which, thoroughly embellished, appeared in the next morning's papers, and Félix Étron was on every one's lips. Not to have heard of him was not to be up with the times. A series of exhibitions was planned in various cities, and the young agent found himself at once as busy as he could have wished.

Gradually it leaked out that three of this artist's pictures had been sold in Paris at phenomenal prices, and after that announcement just enough news of Félix Étron was fed to the public to keep their appetite on edge. Meantime, to the surprise of his friends, Conger Howe, instead of taking advantage of such good fortune, went down to Waquanesett and hired a room for the summer at the Inn. In vain did Galton lecture him on the true American principle of striking while the iron is hot. Conger only replied:

"I think the American idea is to strike until the iron gets hot. It seems to me we worship activity and forget the virtue of patience. We admire the man or woman who dashes in without waiting to count the cost or even to decide whether dashing in is what is needed. The result is all about us; in abortive laws, government interference, and thousands of rattle-headed busybodies who imagine they are doing the world's work."

"Have your own way," Galton yielded, "only if you've managed to stumble on to a good thing over on the other side, you'd better get busy or some fellow will take it away from you while you are dreaming."

So it was that when Galton had his vacation in July the two young men sat on the beach at Waquanesett on the very spot where long ago Galton had built his forts to repel invaders. To-day the same spirit, not content with defensive methods, was for carrying the war into the enemy's country, with the result that, as a man of business, he was a great success, aggressive but

politic, with his heart in his work to such an extent that his business was his life.

"Are you going to be content all your days with being a purveyor of other men's work?" he asked with the directness allowed between old friends. "Aren't you ambitious to create something?"

"I'm afraid," Conger answered, "that I shall have to be content to go on just as I've begun. When you come to think of it," he added, "aren't you also a mere purveyor? Others build railroads, establish factories, found cities, combine giant industries, and you sell to the public the intangible evidences of their enterprise. Yours appeals to man's cupidity and mine —"

"We are just in time to draw the proper distinction," a cheerful voice declared just behind them. "Bess is dying to say that one appeals to their cupidity and the other to their stupidity."

Both men were on their feet as Conger answered Barbara's sally: "That is so near the truth as almost to be indiscreet."

"Well, I knew that whatever I had to say must be put in tabloid form and administered at once," Barbara retorted. "The last time I had a chance to speak to you — which was also the first time — you disappeared into thin air. And now you have come back an art connoisseur, and what is more — I have been in New York and have seen the exhibition of Félix Étron."

"Before Conger has a chance to coach you," Galton interrupted, "let's have your opinion of them."

"Too late!" she flung back. "We went with an artist, a regular velveteen jacket, flowing hair and

flowing tie Frenchman of the Latin Quarter and midnight suppers and things. Only Monsieur Beauchamp wore evening clothes and was bald — but he had the air and the wicked fascination. He knew all about Félix Étron from the cradle to the grave.”

“To the grave?” Conger repeated in alarm.

“No, not really to the grave — but he told us that Félix Étron was such a worker and such a harsh critic of his own work that for the first twenty years of his life as a painter he destroyed every canvas as soon as it was finished. For a quarter of a century that incomparable genius starved in a garret. ‘Then one day,’ to quote Monsieur Beauchamp’s own words, ‘he burst forth upon the gaze of the art loving world with a single picture. It was called ‘The Cousins of Alphonse.’”

“What a thrilling title!” Galton exclaimed.

“Perhaps it was — for Alphonse,” Bess Grayley answered, “And what was it like? A portrait of two spinsters?”

“Mr. Howe can tell us,” Barbara replied; “doubtless he saw it in Paris.”

An instant Conger Howe hesitated, and the puzzled look was in his eyes. Then he spoke with a warmth that deepened the color in his cheeks: “I remember it vividly, but it isn’t easy to describe. It seems like a rainy afternoon and two children coming along the seashore hand in hand.”

“Isn’t it something like an Israels?” Galton asked.

“Not the least bit,” Barbara made haste to say. “Félix Étron has an atmosphere, a certain or very un-

certain something that makes you catch your breath and wonder whether you are seeing what is on the canvas or what your imagination pictures."

By this time the four were seated on the sand. The tide was out, and in huge patches of grey and heliotrope and green the sand flats lay bare, save where in depressions the shallow water gleamed a pure sapphire. On the still air came the creak of Captain Thoph's ox-cart on its daily journey to the weirs, and the knock of its heavy wheels in their boxes.

"And Monsieur Beauchamp said it sold for a fabulous price," Barbara continued. "Some one, it seems, asked through the press who in all Paris owned a Félix Étron, and every one was asking every one else what it meant, when one solitary picture, 'The Cousins of Alphonse,' was offered at auction. It brought — how much, Mr. Howe? I don't want to overstate it."

"Ten thousand francs," Conger answered, "and it has since been sold for twice that sum. The price was only large for the work of an unknown painter."

"But think of the man's passion for greatness, for perfection if you will," Galton said, "that was willing to starve until it accomplished its object."

"Tell us, Mr. Howe," Bess Grayley insisted, "what he is like now that he has achieved. Has it spoiled him, and is he satisfied?"

"My impression of him is that he doesn't yet feel that he has accomplished it," Conger answered.

"Isn't he frightfully old — sort of like Titian in his last days?"

"It may seem strange to you, but somehow you

don't think anything about his age when you are with him. Of course you can see at a glance that he isn't so young as — he used to be, but I forgot how old he was in my desire to get the sale of his pictures."

"Your interest in him, after all, Mr. Howe, was chiefly mer — cantile, wasn't it?" Barbara modified the sting in this remark by the charming smile with which she uttered it. Only Bess Grayley suspected that it was the beginning of an effort to subdue this strange specimen, and bring him into line with her many admirers. If such was her intention Conger Howe did not so far gratify her as to betray any annoyance.

"I shouldn't like to admit," he said, "that my interest in art was chiefly for the money I get out of it, but that counts with me, I grant you that. I am at present self-supporting. That means to me more than you can possibly imagine."

"Monsieur Beauchamp," Barbara rejoined, "knows him intimately, knew him when he was painting and destroying, before he had, as Monsieur Beauchamp puts it, scaled the heights. And he says it is the soul of Félix Étron that grips you in his pictures. I tried to say something about Claude Monet — 'Bah!' he shouted, 'Monet reveals himself behind a thin veil of whitewash. Do you know the breeze, the motion, the life and the coloring that is Sorolla? Do you know, also, Manet, so unlike either? In Félix Étron you have these three combined, and — what, I ask you as a fair observer, what have you in the sculpture of Rodin?' And when I hesitated for words, and finally

said I couldn't describe it, he went into ecstasies and explained:

" 'No, you cannot describe it. That too is in Félix Étron. But I tell you, young lady, it is genius, it is mind and soul, and hand co-ordinating.' "

" Critics have said that his hand is not nearly so clever as his heart," Conger confessed, " that his drawing is exceedingly faulty. I am glad to hear what your Monsieur Beauchamp says because I do not wish to see his work belittled — and the price with it. Wealth, after all, is desirable because it is a means to power."

" Are you particularly desirous of power?" Barbara asked.

" It is the one great object of human existence," he answered.

Barbara pondered this a moment; then she said: " Yes, I never thought of it in just that way before; but I think you are right. Wealth, beauty, strength, intellect, cunning, or charm — we value all of them in proportion as they bring us power."

As they walked back over the winding road that led up to the village Bess Grayley and Galton were a little in advance of the other two.

" It strikes me," Bess said, " that a man must be queerly constituted who is content to be a dealer all his life in other people's art."

" Conger isn't like other people," Galton answered. " With him this is merely the means to a coveted end."

CHAPTER XII

The day had been hot, there was no denying it; the thermometer outside the store bore shocking testimony to it, and the little group gathered on the platform to wait for the mail discussed it broadly and narrowly, *pro* and *con*, by and large. In fact, so thoroughly did they discuss it that the subject was quite exhausted before the mail carrier arrived, and he was only an hour late.

"It seems to be the unanimous opinion," Galton remarked to the doctor, "that this is a hot day."

"Moreover," Dr. Doon added, "it seems always to surprise, to astound, my good fellow townsmen that we should encounter warm weather in summer." And the fat little old gentleman mopped his bald head with a very large handkerchief. The doctor's smooth-shaven, florid face was even redder than usual, and his fringe of white hair was damp, but, unlike the sea lawyers whose dolorous lamentations filled the air and added to its heat, the doctor had been working.

"Seen you agoin' down our rud last night, Doctor," one of them said; "Cy Small's woman, I s'pose. 'Bout time, I should think. Been expectin' for more'n three weeks."

The speaker was a long, lean individual with bottle shoulders and an alarming way of protruding through

his clothes at the extremities. An unweeded beard flourished in rank profusion on his face and neck, and his whole appearance was such as nature had provided without the intervention of art or the petty exactions of fashion.

"Enoch," the doctor said, with an indulgent smile, "as the good Lord's agent I was taking to the Smalls an unmitigated blessing, their thirteenth child. This one was a twelve-pound son who for eight mortal hours contested his mother's right to live. But in the end she won, and now both are doing nicely."

"What supports that family?" Galton asked. "Ever since I can remember, Cy has belonged to that group that Cap'n Thoph describes as 'lookin' for work—not so's they can find it but so's they can avoid it.'"

"The most prominent thing in Cy Small's house," the doctor answered, "is a framed motto, done in worsted on cardboard, that hangs over the fireplace: 'The Lord Will Provide.' I've always wanted to write 'What?' after it, but the Smalls look upon that motto as something sacred. Of course you know who's keeping them and the rest of the derelicts going, this summer."

"Who is it?" Galton asked.

"I thought you knew. It's your friend, Conger Howe. Wrote a note to the Sê-lectmen saying that people that were hungry appealed particularly to him, and please say nothing about it, but look after some of them, and enclosing five hundred dollars."

"Good Lord! He can't afford to do it. I happen

to know," Galton exclaimed; "but what's the use? You couldn't hold Conger if he had the notion in his head. So, you see your text really justifies itself, after all."

"Good!" Dr. Doon cried; "then the proper ending of it in reply to my 'what?' is: 'Heathen to pay the bills.'"

"So you know that also, doctor?"

"He took particular pains to explain it to the board," the doctor said, looking over his shoulder as he climbed into his gig.

In the late afternoon of that same day, just as the birds came out from mysterious hiding to people the trees again with family life and songs and antiphonal twitterings; and just as the many roadside flowers decided not to die but to hold out their cups once more for another draught of the refreshing dew; just before the sun dipped towards his cool evening plunge in the bay over by the Plymouth shore, Barbara Wrayton's runabout shot out from quiet Waquanesett and romped joyously eastward over the smooth, hard road towards Provincetown. Barbara herself was at the wheel, and beside her Conger Howe, and because the road was good, though narrow, and because the car was powerful and swift, and because life was good, and youth loves excitement and danger—they went altogether too fast. By the church and the schoolhouse, by the inn and the scattering farms strung out for miles along the state highway, they raced, regardless of the signboards that warned of "School Children" and "Crossroads" and "Dangerous Curves." At each of these,

Barbara's horn lifted up its brazen voice in timely and uncompromising warning; and the warning was heeded, and the car flew on.

At length they turned off into a pleasant cross-road where was a broad view of the mighty Atlantic, an unobstructed view to the east as far as Portugal except for the curve of the earth's surface. And here they stopped and Barbara sitting back at her ease said: "I told you I had a special reason for inviting you. I want your advice. Why I come to you is a mystery even to myself; but something impels me to trust you with a secret. I feel that you will advise me honestly."

"Very well," said her guest, "I will try to be as honest and intelligent as I can."

"Do you think," she began, "that a woman should be content to fritter away her time in society and — just the little nothings of home life? Don't you think it gets on their nerves after a while?"

Conger laughed: "I've seen proof of that."

"Well," she went on, "I have made up my mind to create something."

"Out of what?" he asked. "I take it you don't mean the something out of nothing sort. That can only be done in theology, I believe."

"You speak as though you thought I lacked every sort of material."

"Material isn't everything," he retorted. "Ability to transform the material into something else is necessary also." He paused, not even noticing the flush that spread over her lovely features. Lovely she was; he had thought, even as he spoke, that he had never

seen a lovelier woman. But she was used to a certain deference that her beauty won her. This man alone seemed to treat her exactly as he would have treated another man. When a girl asks for frankness she means — well, she doesn't mean brutal frankness.

"And couldn't you credit me with material and ability to use it?" she inquired.

"That would be a very broad negation," he said. "In what field do you wish to create? Not fancy work, I take it."

"You are evidently trying to be disagreeable," she flung back.

"No, truly I am not. I may have been too frank, but I cannot seem to imagine you as a composer, for example. You play very prettily, but —"

"It isn't music," she corrected, hoping to help him towards her secret. "I have been writing — short stories, and — I haven't told any one about it, but somehow I thought you would understand."

"Have you submitted any — to publishers?" he inquired.

"No, but I have two ready to submit. The best is called 'The Frozen Flame.'"

"I see," he said; "she didn't care for him."

"Who told you that?" she asked, in naïve surprise.

"Who told me?" he repeated. "Your title. What is the story about?"

"Why, you've rather taken the heart out of it; it's about a perfectly beautiful girl, and a man who was a sort of Otho Cushing god physically, and with a soul to back it up."

"Then, why didn't she love him?" he asked.

"How could you justify your title if she had? Don't you see? I just had to make her indifferent to him."

"I'm not convinced," Conger said, prepared to argue the question.

"That's just why I brought it," Barbara exclaimed, and triumphantly drew forth the manuscript. For ten minutes while he read it Barbara pretended to gaze at the ocean, indifferent to "The Frozen Flame" and to Conger's opinion. But his "Hm!" as he handed it back lacked the glowing enthusiasm for which she had been fully prepared. However, having put her hand to the literary plow she would not look back.

"I want your candid opinion," she said and moistened her lips. Some horrid premonition made them dry.

"There isn't one idea in it," he replied, "that you haven't cribbed from some one else. No! No! I don't think you meant to, but that's what we are mostly; when we try to originate we simply work our memory and fancy it's invention. You will never do anything at story-writing."

A mile off shore, beyond the sand-bars, a tug was steaming north to round the cape with her long tow of coal barges strung out far behind her. Some fishermen with white sails set were beating out to get well off shore before sunset. Down on the horizon a long smudge of smoke told where the Savannah boat was laying her course for the far south. And on the long beach the heavy waves came breaking in dull thunder,

then rushed back with their perilous undertow. How different even on a fair day this outside ocean from the peaceful bay so near it!

Barbara had not spoken since Conger had so frankly stated his opinion. The engine, mysteriously consulted, had decided it was time to go home. The big car backed and turned, and was silently racing back to Waquanesett, but its driver spoke not a word. Once more the scattered farms, cows on their way home confidently daring to share the narrow road with this speeding monster, the signs warning to slow down to eight miles. Outraged beauty at the wheel did not even sound her warning horn. She bit her lip till it bled, but the indicator before her never fell below forty, and the pace at that seemed slow to her.

"I brought it on myself," she thought, "why did I give him the chance?"

To him she said just as they reached home:

"I might have known that a person whose ambition was satisfied by selling other people's work wouldn't care for originality in others."

"Quite likely you're right," he said so placidly that it only made her anger hotter.

But it had never occurred to Conger Howe, brought up by Ya-Tzu, honoring the truth above all else, to cheat Barbara into believing herself gifted when he was sure that she was not. Nevertheless, Conger knew that he was in disfavor if not disgrace, and the ways of women seemed to him past the power of man to fathom.

Galton called on her in the evening and found her quiet and moody. Why was this Conger Howe different from all other men? Did he see any difference in looks, for instance, between her and some old Portuguese berry-picker? And if he was so stupid, why did she care? "Do I care — what he thinks?" she asked herself. "Why, I must admit I do. I care to make him treat me as though he knew that I wasn't seventy-five anyway."

Here was Galton to console her pride. He could be depended upon; he criticised very frankly, said awful things to her — but never things to make her feel small and silly. She would confide her secret to Galton. The rest of the family sat out on the piazza to enjoy the cool of the evening, so they had the living-room to themselves. He insisted that she read it aloud, and when she had finished he seized both her hands in his. "Barbara," he said, "it's wonderful; I can hardly believe it's all you. Why, this is genius! I've never heard anything more original or more thoroughly true to life. And your description of the news-boy's death — absolutely your own, and so beautifully done that I couldn't keep the tears back."

"It isn't like Dickens's death of the crossing sweeper, is it, Galton?"

"Why, I've forgotten that, but I don't believe Dickens ever wrote anything so good, so thoroughly true to life. You see Dickens exaggerated, but this — why, you have a career before you."

But after Galton had gone, when she sat before her

mirror braiding her hair, she stopped short, looking into her own eyes. "I wonder," she thought,—“is that stolen from Dickens? And is it possible that that odious Conger Howe is partly right?”

CHAPTER XIII

"No one objects to a man's taking what exercise he wishes," Barbara said to Bess Grayley, as the two stood one day looking down the road at the rapidly retreating back of Conger Howe, "but why on earth should a gentleman, when others of his class are playing golf or tennis, prefer to come out on the public road, bareheaded and barefooted, and trot for miles like a lost dog!"

"And why the blue overalls?" Bess added. "I'll tell you, Barbara. The man is wrong in his head. It's something to do with his early life in China — sunstroke probably."

"No, Bess, it has to do with his boyhood in China, but the worst of it is he is outrageously sane. He does it because he has formed the habit and is unwilling to give it up. I wonder if he knows what a perfect guy he is."

"Have you seen him in his gardening costume?" Bess asked. "Well," as Barbara shook her head, "he must have got his model for that from the garden of Eden."

"You surely don't mean —" Barbara gasped.

"Almost. As true as I live he strips to the waist. Looks like an Indian. It's simply outrageous. I watch him by the hour from my back window."

"You do!" Barbara exclaimed, and Bess, seeing that she had told more than she meant to tell, made haste to shift her ground.

"I suppose you know about his studio down at the shore in the Myrick's old barn. Studio? It's a mere bluff, his work."

"I suppose it is," Barbara assented, "but then, he can never become an artist without trying."

"Here comes his friend," Bess said; "do you know Cap'n Thoph's daughter?"

Her head was down as though she studied the road, and it was almost hidden under a blue and white gingham sunbonnet, the strings of which hung untied, revealing a dark face of uncommon beauty and stray wisps of jet black hair. Her dress, which was very short, was of the same material as her bonnet. Her feet were bare, and in her hand she carried a tin pail filled to the top with red currants. As she passed the two young ladies her eyes came up to meet theirs, then finding no welcome scowled and watched the road again.

"Long and lean and dark and sinewy, like a panther," Barbara whispered. "She must be eighteen. She's pretty. Why haven't I ever seen her?"

"Don't you remember half a dozen years ago the child that got carried out in the sailboat?"

"Oh, you mean playing in it and the tide came in and carried her off shore? Wasn't Galton brave and modest about that! How he swam out and rescued her and said it was nothing! Is this that child?"

"Yes, that's the one, and you know her next ship-

wreck was more serious." Then to Barbara's questioning look she explained: "Had a baby a year ago. Dr. Doon thought she was going to die, and told her so, but her lips were sealed. Not a word as to the father; obstinate as a mule."

"Good for her!" Barbara said, whereupon Bess, who had been prepared to call the girl a stiff-necked viper, swung over sufficiently to allow:

"There are worse sinners than Relief Snow."

Barbara watched the girl, so silently, so easily, gliding over the road, and when she had disappeared: "And the baby?" she asked.

"Oh, it was good enough to die. They said Cap'n Thoph was in a state of mind, how to reconcile that baby with his position as deacon in the Baptist Church."

"Relief Snow," Barbara repeated, "and what did you call her? Conger Howe's friend?"

"Now, my dear," Miss Grayley laughed derisively, "don't pretend that you haven't heard!"

"Conger Howe hasn't been in Waquanesett for years till this summer. It couldn't have been —"

"This friendship," Bess interrupted, "has to do with the present. It began this summer. She goes down to Myrick's barn every blessed day. Model, you see. That's where the artist comes in. He's just enough of an artist to call his girl friends models. Well, Relief Snow is just as near being a model as he is to an artist. There's that to be said in her favor."

They walked on in silence while Barbara turned this bit of gossip over in her mind. They had come to the

little common in front of the Wraytons' house familiarly called from its shape "The Egg."

At the gate Barbara spoke:

"Why are you so hard on this girl? I don't like Conger Howe any more than you do, but —"

Bess Grayley caught her up here:

"Hard on her! Self-satisfied cat, with her quiet, purring voice and her black hair and creepy ways! Did you notice her legs? Do you think she just happens to wear short skirts? Not much! He's told her they're shapely so she flaunts them in the faces of decent people."

"That's silly, Bess. If she happens to have pretty legs it needn't make you jealous of a poor little country girl."

Without so much as a nod or a look Miss Grayley swallowed her medicine and went her own way, but her face was scarlet and a dangerous glint like steel shone in her eyes. Miss Grayley's temper was peculiarly sensitive to the shafts of ridicule. She knew that she was pretty, and was unconsciously in the habit of assuming that her own measurements were the standards of symmetry. Therefore, when the two friends met again later in the day she was prepared to argue the point.

"It may strike you as petty," she began half apologetically, "but it is more serious than you think — I mean your slur about slender legs."

"I didn't make any such distinction, Bess. I merely stated that, when it comes to shape, Relief Snow needn't fear comparisons."

"Oh! I thought you made a mean remark about me."

The subject of this discussion left her currants at the side door of the inn; then took the short cut across the fields to the shore, by Bassett's Pond, deep, dark, nestling in the hollow of a moraine; over the long, sharp beach grass growing rank in the white sand; crushing with her bare, brown feet the soft green moss under the pine trees; then out on the high bluff at the very edge of the beach. Here was Myrick's barn, a tumble-down old building, no two of its sides parallel, and with a roof that boastfully displayed here and there a few hand-made shingles to prove that Myrick's barn had once been an object of pride to its owner.

The big doors facing the sea were wide open. An easel fronted the light, and before it a man was working in frantic haste to transfer to the canvas those wonderful lights and shades, those soft blendings of color, before yonder clouds should come across the sun, and all the glory and the subtlety should fade and disappear.

He wore a white shirt and white trousers badly stained, and his feet were bare and brown as the girl's.

Without glancing up from his work, he greeted her with: "Hello! Just in time, Rill; take the same pose — right there on the bank where you were yesterday." And, as she got to her place: "That's good! Now, without turning your head, look right at me. Perfect!"

Motionless as the bank itself, yet graceful as the butterfly that perches on the petal of a flower, she stood, half facing him. No wonder the artist in him cried "Perfect." But did the man in him see what lay behind those dark eyes with which she obeyed his bidding? She was looking directly into his face; and all of the worship, the devotion, the self-effacing love with which the dog gazes into the eyes of his master, shone in her eyes, spoke through them, implored him to listen to their appeal.

Twenty minutes later the light had changed; the delicate tints had been replaced by the gorgeous glory of the sunset, and Conger Howe no longer hurried to catch the fugitive tones and imitate them with his brush.

"You pose well," he said; "why does every one call you 'Rill'?"

"Short for Relief," she said, and uninvited took a seat beside him on the old bench that once for generations was a pew in the old Methodist Meeting-house.

"Say, why do you like to paint me?" she asked, hoping to draw the answer that would repay her far better than the dollar an hour which his princely liberality allowed her.

"You have the kind of a look that I want to fit this picture. You go well with the sea and the shore and the gulls—" did Conger see the girl's look of disappointment? If he did he might well have been gratified at the change which flashed into her face when he added—"and me."

"Do I go well with you?" She must hear him say it over again.

"I think we get on very well indeed," he answered. "You're always prompt, never kick if I keep you over time. And, as for me, I never beat you —"

"Sometimes I wish you would," she whispered.

"Now, why did you say a thing like that?" he demanded. "You know very well you don't mean anything of the sort."

At that the girl got up without answering him, and busied herself putting things to rights. The canvases had to be stood carefully against the wall and covered with a rubber blanket, for the roof had proved itself a mere name, and a traitor in bad weather. When all was arranged to her satisfaction she said, "Good-by, Mr. Kangaroo," which was her pleasantry for his name, and back she went over the soft moss, through the cutting beach grass, across the rolling fields, by Bassett's Pond, and so down a wood-road that ended abruptly in her father's yard.

Cap'n Thoph was near the back door, splitting wood for his wife's stove. "You can't get supper and make tea out o' nothin'," Mrs. Snow had called out the door, and Cap'n Thoph called back, "I 'low that's good reasonin', Mercy," and took the hint.

Relief was the youngest of four children. "Gene," the oldest, was a great help to his father. His full name was Genesis, because he came first. Mrs. Snow thought all names should come from the Bible. On naming her second son she skipped from Genesis to

Leviticus because Levi sounded so aristocratic. But when Mary M. was born — that was Relief's older sister — Mrs. Snow erred slightly in judgment, for at the christening, when the Reverend Driggs commanded that she name this child, Mrs. Snow, recently risen from a bed of pain, announced: "Mary Magdalen." Somebody in the congregation snickered and the Reverend Driggs whispered something to Mrs. Snow, whereupon the child was christened Mary M., and Mary M. she was called even by those gossips who were mean enough to say that Mercy Snow had "better 'a' saved that name for her last one."

"Where you been?" Cap'n Snow demanded, sternly, fixing his daughter with a look of righteous scorn.

"Earning money," Relief answered, kicking away some chips that lay in her path.

"Do you call that earning money?" the old man shouted.

"Yes, I do!" she flung back. "And he says it's just as high-toned a way to earn money as — as — as there is."

"Well, I'll tell you somethin'," her father said, laying aside his axe and coming over to where she stood: "If you disgrace Mother an' me again, I'll turn ye out o' house an' home. Understand that?"

Relief didn't answer him, and when she went into the kitchen her mother only said:

"Get on yer apron, Rill, and warm up them beans. Father's hungry and wants fillin' up."

CHAPTER XIV

Conger Howe, left alone, stood in the wide doorway and looked out over the restful scene that spread north and east and west before him. The bay had nearly emptied its tide; long white rows of gulls sat on the sand-bars already out of water, and waited. Half a dozen huge heron flew over them, flapping their heavy wings as they squawked a challenge to the flock below them. With a great flutter the graceful gulls rose and circled in a cloud, then settled down again satisfied with their demonstration of superior grace and numbers. And Conger Howe, whose eyes followed these scavengers of the flats, had gone back in his thoughts to the varied bird life of China — the quail and pheasant and grouse and partridge, the endless variety of smaller birds. Once more he saw himself, a little half-naked urchin, scolding back at a magpie in the Rat's garden. He saw the neighbors who daily carried their catbirds out for an airing, either in cages or tied by a string about the legs. And he recalled the shock when he learned that the object was not kindness to the bird, but that the sight of its free fellows might encourage the poor, deluded captive for several days to sing.

"Nothing is here so green," he thought, "as the young blades of rice in the paddies. Here is no substitute for the wonderful bamboo which at six months

gives us a strong light pole for every sort of use — gives us — us? I had almost forgotten again — I am not Chinese; I am an American citizen. One gains, oh yes, so much, so very much! But it is not all gain; one also gives up some things. How I should love just now to paint one of those circular threshing floors along the banks of the Yangtze-Kiang, and the stone rice mill slowly turned by the patient, plodding buffalo, treading his eternal circle! Poor buffalo! I think I should leave him out of the picture, because of that eternal circle and his blindfolded eyes. There's no such cruelty in this land. And I'd paint the fishermen in their coats of thatch, squatting to watch their nets spread in a wide, graceful V on the long bamboo poles, and raised or lowered by that ingenious pulley. — Yes, I'd choose one who squatted by the river's edge where the bank rose steep and high behind him —"

"Good afternoon!" said a cheerful voice that interrupted this soliloquy. "I just thought I'd see for myself this mysterious workshop and its artistic tenant. May I come in?"

Miss Grayley had dressed with more than usual care, if a white cloth suit, a big pink hat and pink sunshade to match her pink stockings might be held as witnesses. Such was Conger's impression, followed at once by the thought that the right shade of blue would have been far more becoming to her than pink.

"You may come in if you wish," he said, "but there is really nothing at all to see. I haven't fixed up this old barn much beyond arranging for light and a place to sit. It's reasonably clean —."

"But I came to see what you are doing. I want to see some of your work."

"Oh!" he said a little embarrassed. "You are, then, curious?"

She found a seat on what was once the Myrick's grain box, stood her parasol beside her, folded her hands comfortably in her lap, stuck out her pretty white shoes and a certain amount of the pink stockings before she answered:

"It isn't exactly curiosity; it's interest rather; interest in the business you have chosen. I like your spirit, trying to make yourself an artist, too. You see it's interest, after all, in you."

"That's very good of you," he replied, still standing in the doorway where she had found him.

"Well?" she continued. "Aren't you going to meet me half way?"

"Where is half way?" he asked. "You wanted to see my work? Well, this is it: studying the charm of sea and sky, letting it soak into the very fibre of me. It need not be uttered; it may never be expressed just as it is, but if I absorb it, it will some day reappear transmuted, unrecognizable perhaps. But that is the value of the beautiful to those who study it. You have seen me at my work. I recommend it to you also."

"Well, I like that!" she exclaimed.

"So?" he answered, and when she saw that irony or discourtesy was far from his thought, she did not press the point. Perhaps it was safer not to press it.

"But I know you try your hand at painting. You

must have made some pictures of that Snow girl who comes down here so often."

"So often?" he repeated, and it seemed to Miss Grayley that a shadow came across his face, a menacing frown that the girl was quick to heed.

"I thought probably she would appeal to you as artistic. Just what is temperament, Mr. Howe? Mother always says I've been full of it since I was a babe in arms. If it's the ability to love what is lovable, to let oneself go, as it were, I suppose I'm about as intense as a human being can be and live. Is that temperament?"

"Probably it is — one variety of it," he answered. "Sorry not to be a better host, but really I must lock this place up, or I shall be late for supper."

"Then you're not going to show me your pictures after my taking the trouble to come way down here?"

"Pictures? Would you call my attempts pictures?" he countered. "If you would, then it is obviously wise in me to keep them hidden, lest you change your mind about them."

Miss Grayley was disappointed, baffled, but by no means discouraged. This man needed time to learn a woman's ways, but he could be taught.

Together they left the shore to the gulls and coming twilight and solitude. A thin column of smoke rose from the Graggs' kitchen chimney.

"Mrs. Gragg is getting supper," Conger said, "just as she did when Galton was a little boy, long years before Captain Gragg made his money. Don't you like the sweet naturalness of such a woman?"

"I adore it," Miss Grayley said, determined to leave a good impression on this extraordinary man. "And I adore Mrs. Gragg. I'm not sure that I might not go further and adore Galton if he weren't already tagged."

"Tagged? You mean that some one has reserved him, as it were. But he is not engaged."

"No, but any fool can see that she just enjoys keeping him dangling."

"Strange," he murmured, as though to himself, "I had not thought so. I had classed him as the pursuer."

"Yes, I'm not surprised. You would." And with that she left him at the door of the cottage her father hired for the summer, and Conger Howe, turning the corner just beyond, came out on to the State highway and the Waquanesett Inn which stood well back from the road on a high knoll. The doctor's gig was at the side door; the fleabitten gray horse that had acquired a reputation in the county as a dodger of motor cars was hitched to the post under the big silver poplar where, with swishing tail, he kept up a perpetual fight against flies. Dr. Doon was wont to say: "All my nerves are in my horse," and those who had seen the fleabitten gray shy, or lash out with his front feet, when a horse-fly lit on his nose, had also seen the doctor sitting calmly in his gig as though it had been a rocking-chair in his study, and could believe the statement.

The dining-room was full; supper was being disposed of with the usual businesslike haste. Dr. Doon was at Conger's table in the seat next to his, a bit of

good luck, for the doctor was keen on botany and birds and a number of things outside his profession.

"Hoped I wasn't going to miss you," he said, as Conger took his place beside him. Before he could say more the waitress had to learn his decision as to "Apple pie, bluemonge or currants." That question settled in favor of pie, and the good man having made a mental note that young Howe was the only one in the room who hadn't asked him who was sick, he was now free to pursue the real object of his visit.

"That must be quite a good place for your line of work, down there 't the shore."

"It suits me very well," the young man said. "I like broad, unobstructed views—physical or moral alike."

"Hadn't thought of the similarity before," the doctor confessed, "but don't know but what you're right."

"It's the idea of the infinite," Conger went on, "space, more space, until you can seem to project yourself into the eternal. That is the great inspiration as it seems to me."

"Hm!" thought the doctor. "This isn't much like the conversation I came here to have with this man."

He tried again, this time directly to the point. "You see a good deal of Cap'n Thoph's daughter, Rill, don't you?"

"I'm having her every day just now. Yes, she's just right for what I'm doing. You see the girl doesn't seem to suspect that she is lovely and graceful. Natural as some wild animal. Every attitude is charming—and she seems to enjoy the work."

"You know about her, I s'pose," the doctor said.

"Yes, I know about her. There's been a sad chapter, and we must try to make her forget it."

"The se-lectmen"—Dr. Doon got as far as that, and stopped. He couldn't bring himself to say to that sensitive, earnest, thoughtful face beside him that the selectmen had deputed him as chairman of the board of health and member of the school committee to warn the young man of the error of his ways. The girl's father had requested that such action be taken, and one of the summer visitors had written an anonymous letter on the scandal of Myrick's barn, the basis of each complaint being Relief's unhallowed baby and the added sin of her refusal to gratify curiosity as to its parentage.

But now that the good doctor was well launched upon his topic, doubt seized and held him. Why press the point with this serious and courteous young man, to suspect whom of taking advantage of Relief Snow would be alike stupid and unpardonable! And if he were guilty of no such offence what had he done for which he should be called to account? So he hung suspended on "The select-men" until he had thought it out. Then he continued:—"make mistakes, the same as other officials higher up. But they're honest mistakes, so you and I and—and Relief Snow—will overlook them."

"That's a part of the story that hasn't come to me," Conger answered, then added, fearing the doctor might think him curious to hear it, "but that's of no consequence. I am really quite careful that she doesn't

pose too long at a time. Do you find her health impaired — or anything?"

"God bless my soul!" Dr. Doon exclaimed, taking off his spectacles to wipe them on his big handkerchief,—“nothing of the sort. Why, it's the best thing that could happen to the girl to learn — what you are teaching her.”

"Ah!" the young man sighed; "I can teach her but one lesson, that taught me by my Chinese *amah* many years ago: 'He needs no sword whose shield is Honesty.'"

"Good Lord! And we send missionaries out there to teach those people our theology!" After uttering which sentiment Dr. Doon looked at the young man in silence for a full minute. Then he added: "What am I doing here?"

"Haven't you a patient here?" Conger asked.

"Patient? No! No! And look at that horse of mine." The fleabitten gray was pawing up as much of the driveway as he could possibly reach, and stood on end for joy when his master unhitched him and gathered up the reins. Any one else would have thought the fleabitten gray was running away as he whirled the gig out of the driveway, but the doctor turned and waved a good-by to the young man standing under the poplar tree and wondering why the doctor had forsaken little Mrs. Doon to eat a lonely supper at the Inn.

CHAPTER XV

Waiting for the mail is more or less of a social event in the country. That alone saves it from becoming a test of patience.

Conger Howe was expecting a letter from New York. One of that great city's millionaires had set his heart upon owning the picture that critics had called the choicest in the little collection by Félix Étron. To a telegram from the dealer asking lowest price, Conger had replied naming five thousand dollars, and if the truth must be told, he had berated himself ever since for a fool to have set a price that would simply drive away the prospective buyer in disgust. Then he would reason it out: "How am I to know what limit to set for the pictures except by experimenting till I find the top? The minimum is easy enough — most painters get it — but how to discover the maximum?" And each time it seemed plain that he had chosen the only way. So no wonder he was anxious to get his mail. There were not many in the whole collection, and his living depended on their sale.

Barbara Wrayton was waiting too, and Galton Gragg, who didn't expect anything for himself, was very keen and prophetic about Barbara's letter. She hadn't favored Conger with anything more than a nod since their ride and his frank discouragement of her

literary efforts. But Galton, never lacking in confidence, was talking to her about her story, and insisted on dragging Conger into the conversation.

"Miss Wrayton," he said, "has sent her best story to one of the big magazines, and is expecting their answer now any day. I tell her not to let them have it at a low figure just because she is an unknown writer. Of course they'll try to get it for nothing, but I say they'll soon be after all she can turn out, and it doesn't pay to cheapen your work."

Miss Wrayton looked a little embarrassed. Galton didn't know that his friend had given his opinion of her story. If he had known the facts he would doubtless have gone to Conger Howe and called him a bounder, a rotter and a few more choice epithets, after which Conger would have stated his case so simply and honestly that Galton would have felt ashamed, but would have stuck to his own opinion nevertheless.

"Here it is!" she cried, when the mail was finally sorted, gleefully holding up a thick envelope. "I can hardly wait to read it. I do hope they've been absolutely frank and told me all my faults. It will help me in the next one, which is going to be far better."

She insisted that Mr. Howe should come back home with her. Galton was coming and she would read the letter aloud. Possibly she might even enjoy seeing Conger Howe eat humble pie when he should hear the encomiums of professional critics.

The lamps were lighted, and the three gathered about the library table while the enraptured author tore open her first real business letter.

"Miss Barbara Wrayton.

"DEAR MISS WRAYTON: We have read your story, 'The Frozen Flame,' with much interest. It has undoubted merit"— Here the reader looked across the table at Conger to see if he thoroughly understood that. Then resuming: "But just at present we have no demand for exactly that sort of story, so we are very reluctantly returning it herewith. With sincere thanks for the opportunity to read it, We are very sincerely, etc., etc."

For a moment no one spoke. Conger's face was very red because, though he couldn't explain it, he felt very sorry for her, sorry that she had read it before him after what had happened between them. Galton was the first to break the awkward silence:

"You can see what their opinion of it is. That's plain as the nose on your face. They're enthusiastic, all right. But probably the demand is running on some silly trash. Of course they have to publish, not what they want, but what the public appreciates."

"I shall send it right back to another house," Barbara responded. "They don't all want the same style of stories, you see. But, oh dear! the delay is exasperating. I did so want to see it in print, this summer."

Conger tried twice to say something that wouldn't sound like condolence. Finally he took refuge in generalities: "Success, I often think, especially success in creative work, is very largely fortuitous."

"Why don't you say it's a matter of luck if that's what you think?" Galton asked savagely. And Bar-

bara, glad of any diversion, added: "I was trying to figure out what 'fortuitous' meant. I thought it was the adjective for fortitude." But the tension was relieved, and Barbara was quite herself again when Conger left, only the gleam of exultation had given place to a more becoming humility.

That very night her manuscript was mailed to another of the leading monthlies. Better not to waste a day. You couldn't break into the *côterie* of short-story writers in a minute. "Art is long," Barbara's thoughts ran. "But with ability and speed you can cover the distance." And she smiled as her imagination sketched her portrait in the newspapers. "Miss Barbara Wrayton, author of 'The Frozen Flame.'" She was at work on another, far more startling and original. In this a girl singularly beautiful, of a character to match that of any supernal saint, had the misfortune to be brought up by a cruel stepmother whose soul was black as her alpaca gown. Naturally enough, the poor child ran away from home and landed in the superb Italian garden on the estate of a dazzlingly wealthy duke. It was in England where dukes and Italian gardens are not uncommon. After that, life was different. The duke's son, his only son and heir, fell in love with Gwendolyn — that was her name — and in the last paragraph they were married, much to the chagrin of the black soul and alpaca dress and accompanying stepmother. This story was entitled: "The Outcast," and had cost its author many a sympathetic tear and sleepless night. "The Outcast" was sent to a third publisher. With two irons in the fire it

was only a question which should come to white heat first. It must not be inferred that this story was trash. It was, on the contrary, well written, and if its author had already made a name for herself would doubtless have been dramatized for the screen,—there are only a few plots in all fiction, the thousands of stories extant being but clever variations on the old themes.

In spite of Conger Howe's lack of appreciation of her ability as a writer, Barbara constantly found herself thinking of him, wondering why he seemed so indifferent, hoping some day to hear his confession that he had been quite wrong. He seemed a lonely man, working for hours in the garden back of the inn, taking his long excursions on foot, or painting down at Myrick's barn; he was so much alone. Evenings he read in his bedroom. No one could induce him to attend the card parties at which all the young people met two or three times each week. Bess Grayley, called into consultation, declared that she was very glad he didn't come, as she hated the sight of him. "Why?" Barbara asked. Barbara had had from childhood a tiresome habit of demanding a reason for everything.

"Why?" Bess repeated irritably. "Because he—well, if you want to know, he doesn't act like a gentleman. That model business and a little way you may have noticed of being too friendly the minute you're left alone with him."

"You must have made a deep impression, Bess. He has never been friendly with me. Anything but that!"

"Then I'm not going to say anything more about it." Such was Bess Grayley's statement, but she was much disappointed when Barbara dropped the subject there, and refused to be led into further questioning.

Galton was too busy a man to spend much of his summer in Waquanesett. After his vacation in June he got down only for Sundays. His object in such regular short visits was ostensibly to see his father and mother, but they knew that nine-tenths of his real motive was to see Barbara Wrayton. Why couldn't the girl surrender now as well as later? Why wear out their splendid son by years of anxiety when she was certain to yield some day? These questions Captain Gragg and his wife asked each other almost daily, and the only answer was that Barbara had, with all her charm, some of the characteristics of the flirt.

One Sunday she and Galton strolled down to the shore together. Barbara tried to talk of other people and things, but Galton would not have it.

"I've got to get one or two personal questions settled first," he declared.

"Oh, all right," she acquiesced, "if there are two, I don't mind. What I object to is your sticking to one. It gets so monotonous."

"You're so cold!" he flung back; "you've put me off so by that tone I should feel like a fool to tell you that I love you."

"Then, why do you? Why don't you let me wonder for at least a week whether you do or don't?"

"I want to ask you just one question," and the look

on Galton's brow was that of the masterful man who gets his own way in the end. "Do you realize that I have given up every other girl for you; that I might marry brilliantly from a social point of view and that I've turned it all down for you? And don't you see that you are in honor bound —?"

"Once more your favorite metaphor," she interrupted. "You've staked a claim, and I'm the claim. The oftener you talk like that, the surer I am that I shall never marry you. Now be nice and sensible. I want to talk about Conger Howe. Why is he such a woman-hater?"

No better proof of her influence over Galton could be asked than his immediate compliance with her mood. He dropped argument and recrimination and fell to discussing Conger.

"My mother understands him. He drops in every little while, and she can make him talk about himself. She thinks it's his early life, no childhood, no notion of play or friends. Did you know that his only chum as a little boy was a donkey? And he called him 'Brother.'" Hereupon Galton laughed aloud at the thought of it. "Two little donkeys! Brothers!"

"Don't laugh, please. It's no laughing matter," Barbara insisted. "Hungry for love; that's what it meant. Poor little motherless, friendless chap! So he isn't the cold, self-centered being Bess calls him."

"Cold? Conger Howe is so intense that he can take up but one topic at a time. His mind and heart and soul simply focus on subject or object until it is his.

One thing at a time. He develops slowly. But he would die in a minute for one he loves. I think he would for me."

"I wonder if he has ever cared for any girl of his own age. I wonder if — if he could be made to," she replied. Galton would have pursued it further, for he didn't wholly relish this interest of Barbara's, but as he was about to speak a flutter of white caught his eye, far off on the bluff where Myrick's barn stood out against the sky. A woman came out and stood a minute sharply outlined, but too far away to be recognizable to the two down by the water's edge in front of the jagged line of bath houses. A man followed and stood beside the woman. Then she turned away, and they could still see the flutter of white. She was coming towards them; she would cross through the pine grove and so out to the beach within a quarter of a mile of them.

"That isn't Relief Snow," Galton said, when he saw that she too was watching the approaching figure. "Strange if this should answer your question. If so it's the first woman who ever made an impression on him."

"Don't look round!" Barbara urged a little later. "Pretend we are watching that log floating off there. It's Bess; I just caught sight of her, and she will see us in a minute."

They kept their eyes resolutely before them, but at the end of ten minutes Miss Grayley had not joined them. For some reason she had seen fit to avoid them.

Something, hardly definite enough to call a suspi-

cion, restrained Barbara, when the two girls met later in the day, from frankly questioning her friend about the visit to Myrick's barn. Instead she asked her: "Do you ever run across Conger Howe?"

"Why do you ask?" Bess said, sparring for time.

"Curiosity."

"Well, then, I haven't laid eyes on the creature for a week, and what's more, I don't want to."

"Which makes me more curious than ever," Barbara responded in such an unwonted tone that Bess Grayley looked at her narrowly. Evidently her decision was that they couldn't have seen her, for she said no more. But that, trifling as it was, was the first rift in their intimacy. Barbara insensibly kept her confidences thenceforth more and more to herself, and, in trusting her friend less, gradually drew away from her.

Then, one September afternoon, came her turn to study Conger Howe at close range. She was strolling across the fields that rolled in little hills and valleys, a miniature mountain scenery, and suddenly in a sheltered hollow was Conger Howe sitting on the ground. Curled up beside him was a big yellow dog of no breed at all, a dog whose ancestry, polymorphous and polychromatic as it was, extended back just as far as that of your prize-winning thoroughbred. His owner, a Portuguese, who lived back in the woods, had been warned time and again to dispose of him as a public menace. The town was afraid of the yellow dog; man, woman and child gave him a wide berth and a bad name. And, whether this were cause or effect, it

cannot be denied that the yellow dog was hostile to every one he met.

Yet, here he lay, curled up in the sun, and his head was on Conger Howe's knee, and Conger Howe's hand stroked his rough ears. Close behind them grazed a worn-out old horse whose weather-beaten coat had known neither comb nor brush for many months. He was so lame that when he stood still he lifted one hind foot clear of the ground, and his despondent air convinced you that he had heard how his owner had turned him loose to save the cost of a cartridge. Something had drawn the lame horse to join the man and the dog. He had limped painfully over to be near them, and he found the sparse grass sweeter where they were.

Barbara, climbing to the brow of a low grassy hill, came upon them suddenly; there they were, a hundred feet away, and the man hadn't seen her. But the yellow dog was on his feet instantly, growling like the savage he was, and showing his dangerous long teeth.

Conger caught him by the tail and dragged him back. "Down, beast!" he commanded, and Barbara wondered how any one could utter the word "beast" so that it seemed a caress. The yellow dog understood it too, and turned to lick the hand that held him, and the girl went straight down into the hollow to join the other three, wondering at herself as she went. It would have been so easy to keep on with just a pleasant word flung from the top of the hill.

"How did you make friends with these two outcasts?" she asked.

"Make friends?" he repeated. "You do not understand. We have so much in common — and I love them."

"Just like a little boy," she thought, and then it was all so genuine, so natural to this man, she forgot that they were not both children, and sat down uninvited, while the big yellow dog still eyed her suspiciously, and Conger Howe put his arm about the dog's neck to make sure that he behaved like a properly educated person, and kept his dislikes muffled.

"You mean you really prefer dogs and horses and gulls and things to your own kind?" Barbara asked.

"They are so much simpler," he said; "it's an open book. The waving grass all brown and yellow and red where it has ripened and gone to seed,—if it delights you, there it is. Examine, and you find it real grass; the rest is the sunlight and the breeze. The horse and the dog are genuine also, and you may look through their eyes directly into their hearts. No pretence, no deception. Perhaps you say not enough reserve. They are not self-conscious, that is all."

Presently they fell to talking of other things, and that was through Barbara's influence; she wanted to talk of herself, in spite of former defeat.

"Did you know," she asked, "that I am on the very brink of having a story published?"

"What sort of brink? Not the brink of despair, evidently. But I think of a brink as the edge of a steep place down which one may plunge."

"Well, my word wasn't a very good one, but you know what I meant, the ragged edge."

"Ah," he rejoined, without the smallest intention of being unkind, "that must be the Gehenna of most prospective authors, that same ragged edge."

"About a fortnight ago I saw you standing on the brink in front of Myrick's barn. It was Sunday afternoon, and you were not alone. That, too, was a ragged edge, wasn't it? Do you recall the time I mean?"

"I cannot understand why you ask — I had thought none knew or was to know —" he broke off here, looking at her with the puzzled look between his eyes. And Barbara, with womanly quickness, perceiving that her question had uncovered more than she had suspected, was at a loss how to go on. She was very curious to know what it was that he had thought was to be kept secret between him and Bess Grayley. But she had no wish to cause him to betray Bess's secret if such he held, nor was she willing to take advantage of his possible credulity in assuming that she and her friend kept nothing from each other.

"Perhaps you advised her to take the step she did? She had talked it over with you before — before that Sunday afternoon?"

"I didn't say that."

"But you rather inferred it. Well, then, if you only knew of it afterward, what was your criticism? Did you endorse that sort of thing? I am really curious to know how you would look upon it — whether it is the sort of thing that — well, that is done."

She sat very still looking at him. Clearly this was something that he ought not to tell her, would not, if he understood that she knew nothing whatsoever about it. She didn't like to say this in so many words, because at the time it seemed to her that it would sound heroic, an exhibition of virtue. But she was resolved to prevent him from telling it. It was he who spoke:

"I see; you are afraid to speak for fear of betraying her confidence. Quite likely you are right, and yet there is much that has puzzled me about the interview. I do not really know what — what could have been her motive. But possibly you know, and you approve?"

"I cannot even tell you that," Barbara answered. Then she continued, glad to beat a retreat before she got in any deeper, "I have thought a great deal about what you said one day; that what we are striving for is power. I find it absolutely true. It answers every question. It is my one reason for writing. And if I ever marry it will be for the same reason — wealth and position mean power." Conger Howe showed little interest in her marriage prospects, and less in her forthcoming story. In fact, he was much more interested in the yellow dog than in the talented and ambitious young lady. She was tempted to say something of the sort, but a decent pride prevented her.

Gathering her belongings she scrambled up over the slippery grass to the rim of the hollow, and looking back she saw that Conger Howe was carefully picking a burr from the dog's shaggy ear.

CHAPTER XVI

When Bess Grayley, at her first meeting with Conger Howe, announced to her companions that she felt herself called to cure him of his indifference to feminine charms, she little thought how seriously she would come to view her task.

She had no particular idea at first except that common to her sex: that the man who fails to take notice should be taught the error of his way. But the more she saw of Conger Howe the more she was attracted to him, and in that growing attraction she developed a cunning and a capacity for deceit beyond what had hitherto seemed possible to her. She lay in wait for him as he left the inn early in the morning to cross the fields to the shore. From her back window it was easy to keep an eye on his coming and going. She encountered him at the Post Office daily, and the oftener she met him the more vehemently she declared to Barbara Wrayton that she detested him. Little by little, giving herself up to the pursuit, it became a passion, until she could think of nothing else. He was the only man in the world for her. She read reams of poetry by Ella Wheeler Wilcox and other specialists in passionate verse. She lay awake imagining perilous situations from which her woman's cleverness saved him, or his courage rescued her, only to reveal to him in a flash that he had loved her madly from the

first. She could cry herself to sleep over some of these thrilling scenes, but they always ended in mutual adoration and matrimony.

On that Sunday afternoon when Galton and Barbara had seen her leaving Myrick's barn, she had followed Conger to the shore for the specific purpose of arousing his sympathy. That her physical charms unaided were potent enough to win him, she had begun to doubt, but she reasoned that their failure to overwhelm him was only because his eyes had never been opened. His heart however was tender, his sympathies easily enlisted, and then —! It was to that delightful uncertainty that she looked forward with confidence.

Myrick's barn had other advantages than its remote location, or its command of the broad bay, or even the picturesque quality which age and decay sometimes bestow as a slight compensation for the loss of freshness and strength. It was a surprise each year when the winter storms blew over it and through it, twisting it more and more out of shape, that it still held together. But each spring welcomed its blackened sides and just vanishing roof with smiles and sunshine and, though it had outlived every soul in Waquanesett who had known its infancy, it still bade fair to welcome many another generation. Bess Grayley, that Sunday afternoon, was not thinking of these things, but of the advantage the old building offered for reconnoitring. If he were not alone, she might see for herself how he treated other people, particularly Relief Snow. And if he were alone, what would he be doing? It wasn't

likely that he did much painting; he was too bright to imagine that he could ever become an artist. Probably he would be reading, or lying on his back smoking a pipe and dreaming of what he hoped to do or to be. In either case prudence dictated a strategic approach, so she went very softly along the east side where prying and inquisitive strollers on the beach, if any were there, could not see her.

From the bright light seen through the wide cracks it was evident the big doors were open towards the sea, so he was somewhere inside, though not a sound betrayed him. She chose a knothole for her survey; its advantages were obvious. And there, very near her, stood Conger. He was alone, and he was working fast at a canvas that seemed to be almost finished. To Bess Grayley's untrained eye it was a lovely picture. There was Myrick's barn, and the sand cliff on which it stood, and a girl was going down the path with a big stone jug, going down to the old spring that had been brackish for fifty years. "Poor thing!" thought Miss Grayley. "She's wasting her time going to that spring." When she could reason it out calmly afterwards Miss Grayley realized that the light in a barn is dim for seeing pictures; that her peep through a knothole was distinctly favorable to the particular picture; and that it took her by surprise to find Conger painting anything which she could admire.

Stepping softly to the door she presented herself as though amazed to find the barn tenanted. This was conveyed, not in words, but in a due amount of feminine flutter which left her speechless and shy.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, hurriedly, removing his picture and turning its face to the wall, "it's Miss Grayley."

"Now, what a speech that is!" she said, trying to be just a trifle hurt. "Couldn't you add, 'How delightful'—or something?"

"But I was at work—touching up an old thing that might be taken—"

"Might be taken for Myrick's barn," she caught him up, "if one could judge in the flash you allowed me." Then recalling his words, she added:

"So it's not really a new picture. You were just touching up an old one?"

"That was the idea," he assented. But a light was dawning on Miss Grayley. She had caught him touching up an old picture, changing the foreground to make it pass for Myrick's barn. Could it be that he would actually practise such deception even to the extent of selling such a picture as his own? "But I never heard of his selling one of his pictures," she concluded. Still she was keenly conscious that she had discovered something of which he was not at all proud.

The silence was becoming awkward when she said, with complete change of manner as though the incident of the picture had been forgotten, "May I sit down? I'm wretchedly unhappy, Mr. Howe. I don't know why I should do such a thing, but—if you don't mind—may I give you my confidence? It seems as though I simply must tell some one—"

He had offered her a beer keg with an old coat thrown over it, for a chair, and from this she looked

up at him still standing, and he saw tears in her eyes. "You have told Miss Wrayton?" he asked, and she shook her head.

"No; you wouldn't understand, but girls are so unsympathetic, so cattish, towards each other. You know Barbara — self-centred. She can't help it. I'm not blaming her. But no fair-weather friend for me when I'm in trouble!"

Up to this time, it must be confessed, Conger Howe had been much more troubled at the thought that someone had caught him touching up that picture than at the girl's distress. Suddenly, however, he found himself so sorry for her that his own annoyance vanished, and he squatted on the floor in true Chinese fashion, which must be far more comfortable than it looks, and that attitude of repose had at least the merit that it seemed to give her permission to stay.

"If telling me will help you," Conger said, "I will hear it willingly."

"You must hear it. I am not understood at home. You may not know it, but one's family seldom understands or appreciates or sympathizes."

"For me," he agreed, wishing even now to keep to generalities, "I do not know — for there is no family."

"Oh! I remember," and stealthily her hand sought his. True emotion may often be more eloquently expressed by the hand, but he failed to see it, and one golden opportunity was lost.

This failure of his to respond and to let the conversation become personal forced her to take a fresh start. "In coming to you — I mean, in taking advan-

tage of this accidental meeting — I feel, I don't know why I do, that I can trust your judgment as well as your honor and sympathy."

This called for no reply, and he made none, so she went on. "I must leave home. My position there is unendurable. Oh! I know you will say that an only child can surely live with her parents — and all that — but it isn't so. It is quarrel, wrangle, criticism, injustice from morning till night. I have got to end it. I'm not perfect. I don't say that I am; but I am the most sensitive person in the world. You know what that means because you, too, are sensitive. People say things,— they may not mean them, but they hurt. And they are always saying and doing things that hurt me. They seem to think that I have no right to be —"

Tears were falling from those sad blue eyes; her face was buried in her hands, and her bowed head was really beautiful, surrounded by its light aureole of golden hair, shimmering, soft, vitally appealing. He stretched out his hand and touched it. She did not move; it seemed to comfort her. He smoothed the lovely hair as though it had been the head of the yellow dog, and, like the yellow dog, she was very still lest the stroking should cease. Her tears had vanished, a pink glow suffused her neck and ears, and showed between the fingers that still hid her face. And the woman who had won so far with her most primitive weapons was silent because she dared not reckon the effect of a different strategy. Was not this perfect while it lasted? One must make haste slowly. It was a long while before the stroking ended, so long

that her knees were beginning to resent the sharp pressure of her elbows. But, Miss Grayley wisely guessed that this was the first experience of the kind that had ever befallen Conger Howe. A much wider range of similar happenings gave her wisdom, and she waited for him. When she saw that he was likely to rise and break the spell, she straightened up and looking from him out through the great doors, far across the bay, continued in a voice so low it was scarce audible: "My worst offence is that I am — passionately, hopelessly — devoted to a man who — who" — wasn't he coming to her rescue? She gave him abundant time. Finally he asked: "You mean he doesn't — that is, it isn't mutual?"

She nodded, and kept her face resolutely from him.

"Poor girl! I'm very sorry." He had risen and was standing beside her now. He even patted the golden head, and repeated: "Very sorry."

She stood and faced him, so near that he might easily have closed his two arms about her. She raised her face to his, and it would have been but a trifle, a bending forward of the head, to kiss those lips so near his own.

"It is selfish of me to burden you with my sorrow." How natural that he should disclaim any burden; tell her it was only a delight to help and comfort her! He seemed not even to hear her, so she grew more confidential:

"If I only knew how to treat him — I mean whether I ought to let him know. He's such a strange man, so —" Surely a sentence left hanging thus in mid-air

would appeal to his gallantry. At least he would ask her to finish it. There was something uncanny in the way he responded. It left her wondering whether the man actually suspected, or was so utterly ingenuous that thought of himself in such a rôle would never cross his mind. "Far better not, I'm sure. Even in this country where women rule, the idea would shock such a man as you would be likely to care for."

"You will never tell — promise me you will never tell!" she cried. "Oh, I am afraid I've done a very silly thing, but — I just couldn't help it. And you will not be angry with me, will you?"

"I will never tell and I am not the least angry. I am sorry for you. I wish there was something that I could do." He hesitated; then added: "And I wish that you in turn would say nothing about my retouching that picture. It might — give a false impression." She had forgotten the picture. Though he resolutely refused to take advantage of the present opportunity, they were now bound to each other by mutual vows of secrecy. She raised her right hand as though he had sworn her, and repeated his words, "I will never tell."

They came out upon the bluff, and stood there a minute. Then she said: "Good-by, dear friend. May I come again for comfort?"

"Yes," he answered warmly. "Come whenever I can help you!"

The woman made her way along the cliff where a sandy path dipped down out of sight from Myrick's barn, and then out on the level of the beach.

Here it was that she had suddenly spied Galton and Barbara who, fortunately, she decided, were so occupied with each other that they didn't look in her direction.

"And if that isn't Barbara to the letter!" Bess Grayley said to herself, "refuses to marry Galton,— I haven't any doubt he's asked her a hundred times — but keeps him devoted and tries her best to hook Conger Howe also!"

The man back there at Myrick's did not replace the picture. He sat on the ground and braided three long blades of beach grass, but his mind was not on his work. The sun went down red, and was swallowed in a hazy mist, blue-grey, shooting out long bands of purple and orange to north and south. A bat circled round and darted at something just above the man's head. A chill of autumn was in the air. The heavy doors were swung to, and fastened with a padlock, and in the dusk a man was going slowly towards the village.

CHAPTER XVII

Mrs. Gragg was alone in her kitchen. It was her day for baking, and the stove was contrary. That meant that the wind had gone into the no'theast. Coax it as you would, that stove wouldn't draw with the wind in the no'theast, and Mrs. Gragg was afraid that her bread and two loaves of cake and two pies would be ruined. And here was Galton coming down for the first time in two weeks! Galton always said nothing that he could get in Boston compared with her cooking. That was one of the joys of doing her own work when the captain begged her to give it up and hire help.

Some one rapped on the back door. "Come in," she called and, like her husband at the wheel during a storm, never stirred from her post. Her helm was the poker, and with its judicious use she was guiding the good old stove by a sort of dead reckoning known to all great cooks.

Conger Howe, stepping in out of the wind, found her on her knees before the grate. "It's Conger," he said taking a comfortable seat in the big rocker by the window. "Glad to see you," she flung back over her shoulder, and then for some minutes neither spoke. You cannot speak and navigate a cranky stove in a gale without endangering her cargo. And Conger Howe, to whom housework had been the lightest por-

tion of childhood, understanding the danger, the struggle for supremacy, the necessity for coolness and vigilance, sat and rocked.

When the present danger was past, and the stove was drawing properly, Mrs. Gragg rose from her knees and sat where she could keep an eye on her guest, the other on her compass, which in this case was the front of the grate.

"I am going to-morrow," Conger said, and she nodded, evidently expecting it. "I sail from New York, but I want to be sure that those who need me shall be cared for between now and next summer when I return."

"I'll see to it as I promised," the good woman answered, smiling at the young man so unlike her own, yet so dear to her. "But you ought not to do it. You'll be in debt, and then Mrs. Thornton—"

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Gragg, I know. She would say 'I have told you so.' And my dear kind major would feel very badly and would pay my bills. But I have counted the cost and—" Here he drew from his pocket a letter which he gave her to read. The millionaire who wanted to own a Félix Étron had been willing to pay the price, and his check had been enclosed. "Ten per cent, you see?" and he counted out and passed her five hundred dollars.

"I am afraid it is only pauperizing a worthless lot," the little woman temporized, wishing that Conger would be less lavish and more reasonable, if he must give away his money as fast as he earned it.

"But, my dear Mrs. Gragg," he insisted, "one can-

not at least pauperize a nameless dog. I want his license paid again in case I shouldn't get back in time. I want to know that he has enough to eat and a warm place to sleep. Cy Small will see to all that if he knows that his own portion is conditional upon it."

"Why don't you give the poor brute a name if you take such pains to look out for it?"

"You wouldn't understand," he explained, and when she repeated the conversation to Galton she said: "I understood so well I wanted to take the dear, tender-hearted, nameless boy in my arms and hug him."

When the town's poor were surely provided with fuel for the winter, and he felt safe about the yellow dog, something still remained to be done, something concerning which he felt shy even with the motherly Mrs. Gragg.

"I have yet one more request — this must not be known to come from me — it is difficult for me to explain. I shall not try to explain, for you, you whom I love as I love no other woman, you will understand. I wish that some allowance — it need be but little — be made for Relief Snow. Life has given her so little, so very little for one to whom Nature was so kind."

Mrs. Gragg started to speak, to ask him if he understood how delicate a question this giving of money. Then she checked herself. This was Conger Howe. This was the man who was concerned about the humblest, the least attractive people in the backwoods, and an outcast yellow dog.

"I will manage some way to get it to her, and if she suspects who gave it — why, that can do no harm."

Galton, arriving an hour later, was delighted to find his friend had been persuaded to stay to supper, and the three passed a cosy evening in intimate talk of plans and hopes. Mrs. Gragg was radiantly happy. "My two boys!" she exclaimed when they had done comparing notes. "You are as different as"—and when she could think of no comparison to suit her, Galton suggested: "brothers." "Well, anyway," she persisted, "I love you almost as though you were brothers."

"I am very proud," Conger said quietly, "and I can believe you are sincere, dear lady, because of that 'almost.'" Galton, who knew him so well, winked at his mother and began to tell her about the ride down. Once before, when she had spoken so, Conger had told him how his heart had struggled to come up and thank her.

"So you're going back to Paris," he continued, when Conger had had time to recover. "I begin to see a light on that crazy notion you once propounded: that you were going to be a professional amateur. It sounded like spending your life enjoying the fruits of other people's labor. In a way, a legitimate way, that is what you and I are both doing. Only one is never classified as a lover of securities, however true it may be, but only of works of art. But I say, old man, don't for goodness' sake neglect your own talent — talent may be too strong a term for it, but you have real ability. Has he never shown you any of his

drawings, mother?" She shook her head. "Well, he needn't be ashamed of 'em. And I know you have done a lot of painting down there at Myrick's."

"Please!" Conger protested. "I am fond of it. I work at it. Perhaps, some day — there is much time ahead — let us say no more of that."

"It is modesty, mother," Galton declared. "You keep plugging away, Conger. Don't you give your life to selling other people's pictures. I tell you, the day might come when the name of Conger Howe would command a price of itself."

"It never will, my dear Galton," Conger said; "so long as I can get the Félix Étrons there is more for me in selling one of those than in a dozen poor daubs by C. Howe."

The season was ended at Waquanesett. All the summer people had gone, and now Conger Howe's departure for Paris left the village conscience clear of the guilt of subsisting upon imported money, for all were gone who were even tainted with the odium of being outsiders, and for at least six months Waquanesett was about to live upon itself. And while a choice few of its citizens breathed a sigh of relief, Conger Howe on the deck of a ship was reviewing things that had befallen him in Waquanesett. Prominent among these memories was a Sunday afternoon, a golden head that his hand had stroked, blue eyes that looked into his as with uplifted hand their owner had said: "I never will."

It must be admitted that this memory of Miss Grayley was distinctly pleasant, that if the truth were told

no girl had ever made that sort of impression on him before, and that he found that portion of it a delightful experience to look back upon. For the disturbing part of the interview she had given her word never to tell. He also had her secret in his keeping, reposed there voluntarily. Another mystery revealed to him on the same occasion was the hitherto unknown quality known as magnetism. He now knew that to be physical charm; it was still subtle, but he was beginning to understand it.

That his absence should seriously affect any one would have surprised him; that his deserted studio should become a shrine would have amazed him. It is as well, therefore, that he did not see the figure that lay prone upon the dead grass in front of the heavy closed doors the day after his departure.

She looked so young and so beautiful, despite her shabby clothes, that he must have lifted her up and been kind to her from sheer pity. Her eyes were red with weeping; sobs shook her slender body with their violent convulsion; her fingers clutched and held the withered grass that told the story of a summer that was dead. No word escaped her lips, but in her heart the storm of passion beat madly, madly because hopelessly. Her soul was on the rocks, and the pilot had abandoned her.

"I shall see you again before I go," he had said that last day, on this very spot. And then he had come to the house to say good-by, and her mother had shaken hands with him, and her father had kept out of the way because he was afraid to make trouble before

mother, and then he had shaken hands with her just as he had with mother, and walked out! Not a word alone — for her to cherish forever. He liked her and mother just the same. "If he only knew how I'd love to die for him!" Her heart uttered that cry; then something warm and moist brushed one of her out-stretched hands; it lapped her tear-stained cheek, and looking up she saw the yellow dog. Instantly that which had drawn him to her, to comfort her with his generous sympathy, drew her also to him, and she threw her arms about him and buried her face in his neck.

Never before had these two been considerate of each other; jealousy had held them apart. Now the common sorrow brought them close together. The yellow dog tried his best with his stump of a tail to tell her that the past was forgotten. He lay down that his rough coat might be her pillow. His master was nowhere to be found, but in his loneliness he had discovered a new friend.

That same day in Boston Miss Bess Grayley began a campaign having for its object the happy union of two kindred souls, hers and Conger Howe's. It was not the ill-considered act of impulse. Long had Miss Grayley pondered, and each time her conclusion was the same: she and Conger Howe were made for each other. The picture that he was "touching up" to make it look like Myrick's,— why, what did that prove except that he was human? She would have done it without a pang. It only proved that he wasn't above her. He was human and she was human, true as steel — up to a certain point. So, instead of lowering him, that in-

cident rather raised him in her eyes. She could understand it. And didn't the very fact that she knew bind them to each other as few things could? Desirability and fitness being thus favorably disposed of, the only question was how to make him love her. She was wise enough to have seen that the touch of her hair, the intimacy of stroking it, had thrilled him. He was a battery of emotions, if he did but know it. Why shouldn't she, who had discovered it, profit by it before he should understand himself? For, to tell the truth, Miss Grayley saw clearly enough that, if he had that complete understanding of himself which comes only by experience, he might not choose her for his wife. Day and night she gave herself up to this passion until nothing else in life seemed to her worth while, and she had evolved a plan that must start at once and come to a climax the following summer. First, having learned his Paris address, she would write him chatty, friendly little letters, not many, but full of news and a subtle suggestion of intimacy. Galton came next in the scheme; she asked him to call. They had been good friends for years. The note merely stated: "I want to see you," but that was enough. He came next day. She looked very fresh and pretty in her soft grey house-dress as she sat there, pouring the tea.

"You take two lumps," she said, dropping them into the cup.

"Now, how did you remember that, Bess?"

"Nothing the least bit strange about it," she answered, passing him the cup and a plate with little

cakes such as he particularly liked. "You are one of my best friends. That's why I sent for you. I want to make you and Barbara happy."

"Barbara? I'm a little out of patience with her."

"And I don't blame you, but it isn't her fault. She imagines that she's getting fond of Conger Howe."

"O Bess! Never! Why, Conger never looks at a girl."

"I didn't say he had anything to do with it, but I know Barbara, and she has been romancing about him until she begins to imagine herself interested. Now is the time to nip that sort of thing in the bud. They are utterly unsuited to each other. I am going to see Barbara and tell her some facts that will make that plain to her."

"I had an idea that you and she weren't quite so intimate as — well, as you used to be."

"Quite true," she admitted, spreading out her white hands to show him all they held, "and now you see the reason."

He looked at her hands a moment as though trying to make out what it was that they offered him.

"Oh!" he exclaimed finally, "I see: you want Conger for yourself!"

"That's tactless and rude!" she retorted, blushing crimson. "I never intimated anything of the sort. All I wanted was that he should be left free to choose for himself, and not be flirted with by a girl who never would marry him, and who ought to marry you — as she will in the end."

"Have it your own way," Galton conceded; "I

didn't mean to be rude — crude, may be, but not rude — so you'll forgive me, Bess, and we'll start over again."

She looked up and smiled her forgiveness. "If I make it plain to Barbara that it isn't fair to flirt with a man like him, I shall be doing two of my best friends a good turn. At least, that's the way it looked to me. If I'm wrong —"

"Why, of course you're not wrong," Galton broke in with a warmth that showed he welcomed her intercession. Surely his cause needed help.

"Then say nothing to her about this conversation. Not a word — just let things take their course, but don't be tactless and interfere. One more thing — I hesitate to say it — in fact it's an awful thing to say."

"Do you mean it's something else to do with me, a criticism or a suggestion? If so, don't be squeamish; just fire away."

"I think if you should overcome your New England thrift a little more, spend some money on her; flowers, theatre —"

"Just loosen up, as it were," he added, helping her in the difficult suggestion. She nodded, glad of not being obliged to say more.

"Hm! I hadn't thought of that. You women do beat the devil. Come to think of it, I don't believe I ever spent a nickel on her."

"Not a nickel," she agreed, and that made him serious.

"Damn me if I don't send her some flowers now! Bess, you're a trump! I didn't even know the rudiments."

CHAPTER XVIII

To influence Barbara was a harder problem. Bess knew that she had lost ground there, that she was sometimes even distrusted; that the old days of perfect confidence had ended when they began to be attracted to the same man. Because it was a harder problem it must be handled more carefully, more adroitly, less openly.

The first time she called, other girls were there. None was gayer, more appreciative of Barbara, than was Bess Grayley. It was like the old times, and Barbara felt it strangely, keenly, because conscience was asking whether she had been quite fair to Bess. At the next attempt Barbara was alone, and Bess once more outdid herself in sweetness. When a favorable opening came she introduced her subject so naturally and easily that it seemed accidental. "My dear, you know how I've run on about my hobby: Blood will tell. Just before we left Waquanesett I had the shock of my life. Of course I knew Conger Howe was half Chinese, but —"

"He isn't!" Barbara cried, then checking herself: "I mean — I never heard anything of the sort. I knew he lived —"

"Why, my dear, what else is he? His father was a Chinaman and his mother — heaven knows what she was."

Barbara was trying to get used to this news and made no reply other than to look shocked.

"It doesn't matter to us," she got out finally, "what his parents were — we know what he is."

"Yes, that's the worst of it. When I discovered that the yellow streak was there, and no mistake — but I haven't any right to say that — perhaps you wouldn't think so."

Barbara was so startled by the announcement of Conger's parentage that she scarcely heard. Bess sat and watched; when her hostess came out from her hiding she was ready to pounce again.

When Barbara asked: "What gave you any such idea?"

"Any such idea as what?" she countered.

"That he ever showed what you call a yellow streak?"

"I didn't mean to put it so badly as that, and I hadn't any notion of telling even you; but now that we're on it I will tell you only what I know. One day when I was down there at Myrick's he happened to be working on a picture that looked like that very spot at dawn or twilight,— anyway, dim light — and a girl going down the bank. It looked odd, but he was putting touches of color on it, and I happened to ask what it was. You should have seen his face! And, my dear, he swore me to secrecy, not to tell a mortal soul. Now what, I ask you, what was he doing that he was ashamed of?"

"But, Bess, he swore you to secrecy, yet you have told already."

"Only you, Bar!" That was her pet name for Barbara, and she had a charming little way of saying it.

Twice Barbara started to say something. Each time she thought better of it. You couldn't explain it. If it was not important why swear Bess to secrecy? Was it, as Bess put it, the yellow showing through?

With fine diplomacy Miss Grayley soon went on to talk of other people and things. If she dwelt too long on Conger Howe Barbara would begin to suspect a motive; it must be casual, as lightly dropped as it had been touched upon. In leaving, all her interest was centred upon knowing whether skirts were to be worn fuller in the spring, as some of the dressmakers insisted.

"You see, my dear," she said, as a parting word, "it wouldn't mean much to a girl as rich as you are, but on the limited income of Pa Grayley — well, if I have to throw away last summer's clothes, it will be a tragedy!"

Barbara thought over this interview and its revelations many times, but always with a shudder. There was in it something so vulgar — the sort of thing that cropped out in the children when a girl married her father's chauffeur. There was a case like that — they all knew the children — only the chauffeur then was a coachman.

It was disappointing anyway. But she was glad that she hadn't got any more deeply interested. On second thought she had to admit that she might have. He was so appealing; that quiet solemn way was so

different, and his dark eyes! Ugh! Those dark eyes and that dark skin — why hadn't she thought of it!

And just then it happened that Galton Gragg had broken out without warning as a liberal, almost a lavish, spender. Flowers, great boxes of American Beauties, with the longest stems, too! What could it mean? What, unless it meant that Galton had been willing to change his very nature to please her! He who had always held back and let Conger pay the bills when they stopped at tea-houses in the summer, he whom Bess had often behind his back called Mr. Tightwad, he had seen the error of his ways, and was reformed to please her. Because Barbara was a woman, this attention pleased her; because she was merely human its continuance went far towards that surrender for which Galton had waited so patiently.

If he had known that that surrender was being prepared for him by a betrayal of Conger Howe's confidence or a misrepresentation of his parentage, Galton would not for one moment have been willing to profit by it. Not to play fair was to Galton Gragg, as it is to every real man, the vilest sin. He did not know; and Miss Grayley and the roses, theatre parties and a general air of liberality were carrying Barbara on their tide setting all the time in his direction.

Many a true woman is influenced by attentions of that sort and not a few are in the end bought by them. It isn't their fault that they are human. Barbara was merely growing up, learning by experience what life is and what its possibilities, but she was not going ahead blindly. Every day she reviewed the steps that

had led her to her present position; every day she tried to picture herself as Mrs. Galton Gragg, and always before she was through with it, her future became more and more hazy.

"Some women are unfitted to be wives, to lose their identity in that of the men they might marry — and I'm one of that sort," she would say to herself after such communing, and then almost immediately would follow: "I wonder — perhaps it's only fear — and any girl would be proud of Galton."

Meantime Conger, working away in Paris, had a far harder task in trying to understand American girls in general and two in particular. The devotion of Relief Snow — that was friendship and would be just the same if she were a boy, so that didn't need any contemplation and adjustment, but the other two — it was all so different from China, and after all wasn't it better as they did things there, to have a girl's parents choose for her some eligible spouse? Surely the parents were wiser than their children and the girl would get a better husband — perhaps.

Then would come up this new question: whether it wasn't asking too much of a woman that she should be a sprightly and accomplished companion, a house-keeper, and the mother of one's children. The old civilization of China had long since given its verdict that the trinity was impossible.

Thinking the way of Americans was far harder than thinking in their language. Here before him lay a letter from Galton. It was eloquent of love — his love for Barbara and hers for him. Conger read it

over and over again, not because it was so fine, but Galton was so sure of himself. He wrote of the sacredness of a boy's love for father and mother. Conger had never known what that meant. The letter went on to speak of "your first very dear friend." His had been "Brother," the little donkey back there in Peking. Of all his new friends the yellow dog came first in his heart. No, it was useless — he could never get Galton's point of view.

But he was lonely; his whole life had been lonely and he knew he was capable of very strong affection.

He closed his eyes and once more he was a boy; once more he winced as he recalled the harsh blows of the bamboo cane on his bare back. Ah, he had it now! One of the many beatings had been due to a little girl with ragged clothes and bare feet, like his own, and a rippling smile like Barbara's. How it all came back! The dust in front of the great Lama Temple — beggars, blind men, blue cotton clothes, the cries of street vendors, the creaking wheel-barrows of the water-sellers, the pungent smell of Chinamen, the greasy smell of greasy food, the foul smell of the great city! He saw other barelegged urchins like himself, and the vision of the evil-eyed, leering priest of Lama. For one instant his hand had fallen from the back of the 'rickshaw, and the Rat, looking back, had seen him forsaking his post, had seen the sudden charge with which he had sent the dirty priest sprawling on his back. But the Rat hadn't seen the shy, grateful smile with which the girl had rewarded him, a smile that started at the corners of her eyes, spread down-

ward to her pretty mouth and ended in a boy's heart!

And Barbara's smile was like that — he was only a boy then — now he was a man. How very little difference deep down in one's own heart between being a boy and being a man!

He wondered whether real Americans were ever conscious of marking time, shillyshallying while life went on all about them. Did these other people go straight for their goal, did they know what their goal was, or was it a part of life to drift until you brought up somewhere in some bend of the stream?

CHAPTER XIX

Down at Waquanesett, after an unusually hard winter, the spring came early. Even in April the robins and song sparrows were building; the meadows were dry enough for planting; the wood-roads were passable and sweet with arbutus and violets. Off on the hill-sides the horses, bowing their necks, tramped fetlock deep in last year's furrows, while the shining plow behind them cut through the heavy earth, curling it in long, dark waves from its prow, turning up its chemical stores of energy that sun and rain might give them life. The birds, the blossoms, the very earth sang of spring. Is it any wonder, then, that Relief Snow, who was young and fair and overflowing with life, should also sing? And what more natural song for youth and spring than the song of love, the eternally recurring theme! Relief Snow knew nothing of Mendelssohn or the other writers of spring songs, but she knew the throbbing song of the bird to his mate. She knew also that birds and spring and love were a trinity, miraculous, heavenly and inseparable. And because she knew no songs of love save those in the Baptist hymnal she first tried to express her emotion in a verse of "Jesus, lover of my soul!" When this came down by way of the back stairs to the kitchen where Mrs. Snow and Mary M. were at work, they stood and looked at each other in amazement.

"You don't think Rill has got religion, do you, Ma?" Mary M. asked, as the voice upstairs began on "Love divine, all love excellin'."

"I wisht she had," her mother answered, listening with pride to the fresh and joyous tones of the singer, "but I ain't cherishin' no sech hopes o' Relief."

Apparently Relief had exhausted her repertoire, for, after a brief interval of silence, she began improvising on the theme: "I love my love." Her song declared that she loved her love up the scale and down the scale, in *arpeggio* and *cadenza*, and in many other florid forms not known to orthodox musical composition. Her mother looked hard at Mary M. and said: "I thought so. Hers ain't the holy kind." The saucepan that she had just lifted from the stove was set back with a bang and, going to the foot of the stairs, she called in a voice to discourage any and all music: "Ri-ull! Ri-ull! You quit that caterwaulin'! If you ain't got nothin' to do you better come down an' help us."

Hurried feet came clattering to the top of the stairs, and Relief's voice called: "I'm workin' on my dress, Ma. Where's father?"

"He's out to the barnd," her mother answered, far more gently. The clattering footsteps retreated once more to the bedroom; once more the song of love poured forth, while the dark young head bent over its task, and the busy fingers fashioned a wondrous gown designed to welcome back the tenant of Myrick's barn, who also was the tenant of Relief Snow's heart and the subject and inspiration of her song.

She had never asked Dr. Doon the source of the five dollars which the good man brought her each month. He had said the first time: "It's a little legacy turned over to me to pay over to you," and her eyes had filled with tears as she turned away with the money in her hand. Who else would send her money? Who else in the world cared whether she had money or happiness; whether she lived or died? And she had saved it all to buy a dress that should surprise him when he came next summer. The store in Waquanese-tt had nothing in fabrics that could satisfy her, but the next town, five miles away, offered far greater inducements, as distant towns always do. The ten-mile walk was nothing if you could bring back under your arm enough purple cotton cloth to make a dress, with yellow moons all over it that fairly jumped at you. It was very lovely in Relief's eyes; and she saw herself the envy of the summer folks when she should appear in it to welcome the only one who mattered. If he liked it, the others might go hang. "Noses in the air just because they wear high-heeled shoes and lacy shirt-waists! Who cares?" That was her fine independence as she sewed and sang. Usually she had cared a great deal, and many a night her tears had fallen unheeded as she undressed and sat on the edge of her bed while she contrasted her lot with theirs. But now the singing went on uninterrupted; this morning her heart was full of thanksgiving to whatever it was that made the spring and youth and love and beautiful purple cloth radiant with yellow moons. Father

was out in the barn, and couldn't hear. Mother never meant anything when she scolded. There was that awful time when they knew the baby was coming! At thought of it the singing ceased abruptly; a shudder ran its course over the slender shoulders; two big tears dropped on the edge of one of the bright yellow moons, and the purple spread, threatening an eclipse.

"Father was so hard — p'raps he never did anything himself!" the girl muttered. "Can't fool me. I've watched him; they're all alike! No, they ain't, either. He ain't like that, for one."

And the one in Relief's mind was so potent for joy that once more her song rang out, and the sad past was forgotten.

The style had changed many times since Butterick had issued the pattern by which she wrought, but to Relief Snow the Mother Hubbard was the very acme of style. As a restraint, to curb its voluminous proportions, she had recourse to a sash which, drawn tight about her waist, did much to display a figure that had never yet known the indignity of a corset. The trying on was very satisfactory. By standing on a chair she could see in her mirror the skirt down to her knees. Just how it hung below that was of little consequence; the neck was the most important, and it required a couple of gathers to get that finally to stay where it belonged. But it delighted Relief when a last scrutiny revealed her emerging above the draw-string like an Indian princess coming out of a gorgeous bag. Little did she understand that all the beauty was her own,

which even that barbaric costume could not quench. "Ri-ull!" her mother called. "Father's comin' in, and the dinner's dished."

With marvellous rapidity the glorious creation was whisked off, the blue and white checked gingham took its place, and Relief's fingers were busy with buttons as she slid into her seat at table just in time. Cap'n Thoph, in his shirt-sleeves, had extended a hand on each side of the boiled ham, and had already opened his mouth to invoke the divine blessing upon the pig's joint and those about to partake of it, when he spied the unbuttoned dress and Relief's frantic efforts to complete her toilet. Fixing her with his eye he demanded: "Are we goin' to hev a blessin' said over this food, or ain't we?" Gene snickered, and the old man, who believed in vicarious atonement, laid the whole burden of guilt on poor Relief. If he insisted on her answer he should have it, and she flashed back: "I don't see as it matters. The dinner won't taste any diff'rent, an' the Lord wouldn't notice on just one ham, anyway."

Mary M. wanted to laugh, but a glance at her mother showed her this was a fearful crime. In silence the old man rose, seized his youngest by the ear, and led her from the room in disgrace. Back beside her own little bed she gazed down upon the beautiful purple dress lying there as she had dropped it. Was nothing, nothing at all in life to be happy for her? One little glimpse of Heaven she had had as she saw herself in that gown only a few minutes ago, and now a hungry, solitary afternoon in disgrace. "Oh, how I hate them

all! Father, the hypocrite! Haven't I heard him swear hundreds of times like a trooper! Him and his blessing! The idea of him yankin' me out as though I was ten! I'll get even with yer yet, old man!" She sank on her knees beside the bed, and there in sight of her proud handiwork, instead of prayers, poured forth her soul in imprecations against fate and father who had combined together to blast her slightest chance of happiness.

Just before it grew too dark to see, she drew from its hiding place under a corner of the carpet a letter postmarked two weeks ago at Tacoma. When it came she had been tempted to tear it up; second thoughts had suggested that it would do no harm to keep it. Now, as she re-read it carefully, it made her think of the little boat hung out on the davits over the side — a last resource in shipwreck. It was a better letter than she had thought. But her mind then was full of him; now it was father, and the letter was greatly favored by the new comparison. With far more respect than before she replaced it under the carpet. The figure of the little lifeboat persisted. If fathers and fates were cruel, so long as youth and life lasted one might run away from them, and try other fates. But then, he would not be there. She would never even see him; and he would never know how she looked in the purple dress.

Some one was lowering the lifeboat; the tackle fell heavily on the deck; overhead a hundred yellow moons came up to shine in a purple sky, and Relief in a huddle beside her bed was sleeping like a tired child.

CHAPTER XX

Miss Grayley's plan had worked admirably; as an organizer she had shown such ability as would have made her invaluable to one of the great packing plants. No silly scruples had been allowed to stand in her way. If a certain amount of deception had been practised, the end attained would surely justify it. Galton and Barbara had been drawn closer together than ever before; the announcement of their engagement might be looked for any day. "Dear Bess" was the friendly superscription of Conger Howe's letter which came with punctilious regularity every fortnight. Galton was never a good correspondent; he was too busy to write letters. Those that he did send were dictated to a stenographer, and after acknowledging the receipt of two from "Dear 'Cougar,'" went on for half a page to explain that nothing was happening in Boston, that the weather was beastly cold or warm or wet or dry, that certain things were almost sure to happen soon, but of such a nature that evidently he didn't care to confide them to the young lady at his elbow. Then followed a few lines of plain padding: "Of course, you know what Boston is, how she glories in her provincialisms and thanks God that she isn't as New York is." He signed that particular letter below the phrase "One of the Pharasees," but didn't correct his stenographer's spelling. There wasn't much of a personal touch in

such correspondence. Conger always felt that he was replying to the blonde, and so finally gave it up altogether.

After the first few months, with the exception of an occasional letter to Major Thornton or the Thornton girls, Miss Grayley was his only correspondent. Sometimes her letters hinted at the dark secrets they shared; his in reply never even remotely alluded to the subject. His were straightforward accounts of daily life in the artist colony at Paris, frequent comment upon things and a whimsical half-seriousness that was like the lines in his forehead. He was very difficult to persuade in some ways; try as she would, Miss Grayley, who had led him by the halter of affectionate solicitude to the water of life, could not make him drink. Even the most direct questions as to his feeling towards her were passed over in silence. His likes and dislikes he refused to analyze.

She was, however, somewhat comforted when he confided to her alone the exact date of his sailing for home and the careful plans he had laid for free advertising in the press "to the glory of Félix Étron, albeit to the enriching of one Conger Howe."

She was at the dock to meet him, but a large, florid man, with much jewelry, very curly hair and the ingratiating manners of a circus agent, surpassed her zeal and took the edge off her welcome by rushing up the gangplank, seizing the young man's hand in both of his, and establishing an appearance of ownership that would ill become a modest single woman. So Miss Grayley came in a poor second, but Conger was

very cordial and friendly, introduced the florid gentleman as Mr. de la Barre, promised to come and see her very soon, and did his best to make conversation general while they waited for the usual formalities of customs officers. Mr. de la Barre, however, had no intention of allowing the young woman to interfere with his plans, and talked in French. This made it extremely difficult for Miss Grayley, who knew as much French as the average American girl; she could ask for a glass of water or her bill, could read all that one really cares to read in the menu, and all except the crucial word in the jokes of *Vie Parisienne*. But they talked so fast no one could be expected to follow such gibberish; it was hard enough to keep up an air of intelligent interest. And then, to do her full justice, she did now and then intercept a "bien" or "comprend," even "Félix Étron" and then she would get right into the midst of things by such nods of comprehension that the florid gentleman was almost deceived by them.

At last the examination was finished; not so Mr. de la Barre, for like the manager he was there must needs ensue a great raising of hats, a lowering of hopes, and then a waiting taxi that engulfed the two men, leaving behind Miss Bess Grayley and a strong odor of circus agents' favorite perfume.

Once more the name of Félix Étron blazed in the news columns of the daily press. Ten of his pictures were to be sold at auction in New York, and the Metropolitan Museum had already bid seventy-five hundred for first choice. One interview that was

widely copied went into the question of how it happened that a young Bostonian had the rare good fortune to represent the great artist in the United States.

"Mr. C. Howe," the article stated, "when asked how he secured the agency, explained that he once lived with Therat, and we infer that Félix Étron at that time may have studied also with the same master. This would account for his loyalty to an old friend when competition is so keen, and there are so many well known dealers in this country." In writing out this interview for the reporter C. Howe had not explained. He had told only how he once lived with The Rat, but words are queer weapons, and Conger thought it safer to be vague. One interviewer, though balked of details concerning the great painter, thought he might at least give a vivid portrayal of his agent.

"In appearance Mr. Howe is decidedly Spanish. He is often called The Sad Painter, for Mr. Howe is also a painter, although his pictures thus far have never been offered for sale. It is said among his friends that he never laughs, never was known to take part in any sort of game or sport, and that his only recreation is a change of work. His long, slender hand when he talks with you is constantly brushing back from his forehead a lock of his black hair that will not stay brushed back, but otherwise his calmness impresses you, and his interest in whatever you have to say. You come away with a feeling that you have made a very favorable impression; later you realize that you have found out very little as to the object of your visit."

Conger's first social duty was to write his patron telling of his arrival and asking when he might see him alone. Major Thornton wrote in reply urging him to dine at his house that very night. His note betrayed a father's eagerness to see his son. Its answer was a telephone message:

"Major Thornton, this is your grateful and fond ward, Conger."

"No, no," the major expostulated, "not ward; you are something far nearer than that —"

"So?" came back.

"I want you," the major went on, "to look upon me more as a father."

"Thank you, Major. I have told you you are almost to me as dear as my mandarin."

"That's going back too far," Major Thornton protested. "Well, how about dinner to-night?"

"I am sorry, Major, but to sit at Mrs. Thornton's table, knowing how she feels toward me —"

"It's my table; I am inviting you to — see here, Conger, I like your spirit but, damn it all, you shouldn't have sent me that draft. I've got to see you about that. Now, do be reasonable."

"I will see you at your club any time that you may choose."

"Then we'll dine there this evening."

"Very well, sir, and I am delighted to have it so."

When they met at seven, Major Thornton was surprised to see how Conger had matured in eight months. It flashed through his mind that even Mrs. Thornton might hesitate to patronize this fine, serious-looking

man. The major's greeting was quite different from what he had intended a moment before. One couldn't call such a man to account for having sent from France a statement of all expenditures on his behalf for the past eleven years, and a draft defraying the total outlay. It was not until after dinner, over their coffee and cigars, that the major ventured:

"My boy, I won't ask why you paid me, but how on earth, even with this agency of yours, could you raise the money?"

"One or two little ventures over there have resulted exceedingly well."

"But you have had no business experience until you managed to hypnotize this great artist."

"You forget," the young man said, looking straight into his father's eyes, yet seeing there only a strangely interested friend, "you forget that I was once in the rug business."

"Poor little chap!" the major sighed, and to Conger's amazement, the major's handkerchief was needed to brush the tears from his eyes. "I want you to know," he said when they parted, "that I'm very proud of you; that you're to come to me any time for money or help of any sort. And I wish you would try to feel differently towards my wife."

"Does she?" Conger asked, and that so upset the poor major that he didn't even attempt a reply.

Soon after this dinner Conger went one afternoon to pay his respects to Bess Grayley. By her tactful devices Miss Grayley had succeeded in making herself one of his most intimate friends. It was as Bess and

Conger that they greeted each other, and his pleasure was manifestly genuine, much to the surprise of Barbara Wrayton, who was spending the day with Bess. These two had been far less friendly than in the old days, and it was by special invitation that Barbara had come up from Waquanesett. The Grayleys had the same cottage for the summer, but had not yet moved down to it. The day was warm, the air sultry and lifeless; the two girls looked refreshingly cool and dainty in their light summer frocks. Strangely enough they had just been discussing Conger Howe, and Bess had repeated her former opinion, expressed almost a year ago, that he was odious, that she had always detected a certain something in his eyes which was tricky. She wouldn't trust him; she detested him. And then suddenly his card had been brought, and she had told the demure maid to show him in. Barbara, glancing up, expecting to be told who the visitor was, had caught a twinkle in the maid's eye such as might have been there had the maid been listening to their conversation, and Barbara was therefore prepared to see Conger Howe. What she was not prepared for was the evident intimacy that had grown during his stay abroad. Bess had been lying to her, deliberately, but for what purpose?

He looked older, sadder, but sure of himself, and in vigorous health. His skin was clear and tanned a rich brown; his eye flashed in a way that made her think at once of some one else, though of whom she couldn't at the moment recall.

"Is this, then," he asked, seating himself comfort-

ably on the wide divan, "what you mean by killing two birds with a stone?"

"Are you quite sure you have made the killing?" Barbara flung back, with a laugh.

"It would profit one nothing here," he said, with that queer little puzzled look that had interested her from their first meeting, "here where one is allowed but one wife at a time?"

"What a horrid idea!" Bess broke in. "Would you wish to teach a Christian country your heathenish Chinese notions of polygamy?"

"They are not my notions," he answered; "it is that China practises polygamy, this country monogamy. One is not necessarily better or even more righteous than the other."

"That means you would like the Chinese idea better than ours," Bess declared.

"Not for myself," he replied quietly. "There is in China a saying: 'How many wives, so many troubles.' It is because women do not agree so well among themselves as men."

Instinctively Barbara and Bess looked at each other, but neither was prepared to debate the point then and there.

Barbara, who was beginning to fear that this serious man might take the twist given his remark too literally, changed the subject abruptly by asking: "How is your adorable Félix Étron? Monsieur Beauchamp wrote my father, the other day, that he recently painted a Madonna and Child so beautiful, so spiritual, that the nuns from the convent of the Sacred Heart went in

a body and drew the dear old man in his carriage out to the Bois where he was completing the background."

"There are so few Frenchmen in this country," Conger Howe said regretfully, "Monsieur Beauchamp must know Félix Étron and his little circle very well. They are few who know him."

"Then it is true — I mean about the nuns — it seemed so theatrical —" Barbara hesitated.

"Ah," he assured her, "one must not forget that to the aged come demonstrations of affection denied to those who might more highly value them."

"But he is a lovable old character," Barbara insisted. "I know he is from the mystery, the depth, the wonder in his pictures."

"You see that?" Conger asked; "then you will understand when I tell you that I love him. I used to think, at the first, that I saw in his pictures what it was given to none else to see. I have learned — this!" and he stretched his arms wide seeming to the girl facing him to open the doors that all might come in.

She didn't ask for an explanation; she felt that she could understand his point of view. He had seen the beauty, the subtlety, the charm in Félix Étron, had thrown himself heart and soul into the work of introducing the world to that which had dawned for him. And to his surprise, to his great joy, had come this instant response. Was it any wonder that the fine old man, recognizing Conger Howe's value to him, remained loyal despite the tempting offers of influential dealers?

CHAPTER XXI

A curious effect of this call was that it left all three wondering, uncertain, anxious to know more. To Bess, most of all, it was disappointing, baffling, that Conger's attention had been all but monopolized by Barbara. She was too bright not to know that Barbara had seen through her mask, seen that she was playing false, and would naturally speculate upon her reasons. It was not to be supposed that she could have spoken honestly in disparagement of one with whom she was on such friendly footing. Barbara had found her out, and there was no help for it.

Barbara had been shocked to find so wide a discrepancy between Bess's talk and her conduct, but had not been wholly unprepared for it. She reproached herself for a fool in having for a year accepted Bess's false estimate of Conger Howe instead of forming her own judgment. As she thought it over she even concluded that there might be some leniency shown regarding the strange copying or retouching that he had seemed ashamed of. No nice girl would marry a half Chinaman, of course, but one might be friends with him. Doubtless their ideas of right and wrong were on a lower plane, as all foreigners' ideas were, to a greater or less degree.

And if the afternoon had brought its surprises to

Bess and Barbara, it was no less a shock to Conger that Bess had appeared to him jealous of her friend's presence — his sensitive nature had grasped that fact at once — and that Barbara had shown none of the qualities attributed to her in frequent confidential references during their correspondence of the winter. It was confusing, but his loyalty to this new friend forbade more than a passing chill of disappointment; then once more she became for him what his imagination had pictured her during the year of their growing friendship.

Such were the relations among these three when they were settled again at Waquanesett for the summer. The disreputable yellow dog must have learned that C. Howe was his benefactor, for, although never allowed to set foot within the sacred threshold of the inn, he was patiently waiting outside in the yard every morning when Conger finished breakfast, and no inclemency of the weather caused the slightest deviation from his regular attendance. A bright new collar testified to his legalized existence, but so little accorded with his general appearance of shabbiness and rowdyism that it stood out like a shiny silk hat on a rag-picker. The moment C. Howe appeared the yellow dog's emotion convulsed him into such contortions that he seemed to wag all the rear half of his body; then he would leap as high as the man's shoulder, uttering his short, sharp bark of welcome. All day the yellow dog kept close beside the man he worshipped, and when night came he disappeared, none knew where, to sleep and dream of the morrow.

On the second day after the arrival of "the tall furriner" had been town gossip, C. Howe was at Myrick's barn, getting things cleaned and set to rights. His was the thorough housecleaning of the trained worker — and dust, field mice, sand and broken shingles flew in an endless stream far out over the steep bank, pursued by the relentless broom of efficient zeal. The yellow dog had just been exhorted in Chinese to get out of the way, and, understanding, had heeded the advice, when a step was heard, and the stumpy tail heralded the approach of a friend. Half a minute of expectancy, and in the full glare of the bright morning sunlight Relief Snow stood before the door, clad in purple and bright yellow moons.

"Why, Relief!" Conger gasped; then instantly he knew that she was wearing it for him. Her heart showed itself in her eyes. He couldn't mistake it. "How lovely you look!" he lied, and thanked goodness that he had lied in time.

"Do you really like it?" she asked, smoothing the skirt into place with evident admiration of its loveliness.

"Like it? Why, my dear Relief, you are charming in it!" and, coming out to her, he turned her round for a more careful survey. The girl blushed with pleasure and the consciousness of beauty, never dreaming that the loveliness was not chiefly in her raiment and the boldness of its color scheme.

"I've been waitin' for you ter come back," she said, looking away from him at the power dory panting laboriously up to westward.

"And many a time I have thought also of Waquansett," the man said: "of this quiet spot where one looks across the sea from the sand dunes to the sky, and knows the meaning of the words 'from everlasting to everlasting.'"

The girl turned to look at him. This impersonal tone was not in keeping with her thoughts.

"I don't know what you mean," she said, simply.

"I mean," he answered, "that men and women — and yellow dogs — are of very little account compared with the sand and the sea and the sky. They have been here countless ages; they will be here for countless ages to come, but we — Time snaps its fingers at the little space in which we, poor silly things, come, and build our fences, calling so much ours, and are gone. It is all so short, so unimportant! But here — you and I come face to face with great and lasting things. It shall not make us sad, this looking at life as it is, but it must give us perspective."

Relief had turned her back by this time, and was interested in the yellow dog.

"What's that claw for, hangin' down on his leg? Look's like it ain't any sort o' use?" She had no idea of being rude, but her mind didn't follow his — all this talk about sand being real and people not being real.

"That is what some ancestor very far back used for a thumb," Conger explained, but she only shook her head and said: "You're off again! There's nothin' to it, nothin' to it!"

Some one on board the power dory had seen them,

and was waving a handkerchief. Relief caught up one of his dust cloths, and responded vigorously. Her arms lifted above her head, skirts and hair fluttering in the lazy breeze, she looked so strong and young and glowing, "she even overcomes the biting harshness of her clothes," he thought.

Turning suddenly she knew that he was watching her, she even caught a note of admiration, and, with a child's directness, asked, "Are you goin' ter marry the Grayley woman?"

"The what?" he asked, to give himself time to treat this idea without hurting her feelings.

"The Grayley woman," she repeated, trying to look disinterested. "She's made up her mind to have you."

The yellow dog half rose, stretched his long legs slowly as far as they would reach, yawned capaciously, audibly, and lay down again at full length on the ground, every muscle and nerve relaxed, every anxiety banished, every sin atoned or transferred to his master's shoulders by the comfortable practice of confession and absolution. With neither guilt nor hunger to disturb him, it is little wonder that he soon snored profoundly. Relief had sat down on the huge relic of a broken mast, a bit of driftwood that like a sleeping giant lay alongside Myrick's barn. Not unmindful of her new gown she had cautiously lifted the glorious skirt, and it spread about her, converting the weather-beaten log into an Oriental couch.

Miss Grayley had been dropped; the yellow dog had had the last word, but Conger Howe was thinking: Was it true? Did she care for him to that extent?

And how came Relief Snow to know anything about it?

He was standing in his favorite place; leaning against the jamb of the big door, and he had lighted his pipe.

"Seems like we hadn't left, an' it was still last summer," Relief said finally. "'Cept I didn't hev no sech dress — say — did you think I wouldn't know where the money come from? Doctor Doon ain't got no more play-actin' about him 'n a heifer calf. 'Cute he is, too, some ways. I remember when Mary M. had dipthery — she was awful sick an' we thought she wouldn't fetch through. He come an' stood to the foot o' her bed an' told her she was much better. But then, yer see, that was straight lyin' — it wa'n't no actin'. Why did you do it, Mr. Kangaroo?"

"Because you and I are friends," he said, smiling, "and I wanted to feel that you had a little that you could call your own." Then pointing to the east he went on, "See that long line of smoke left by some steamer just rounding the cape? I am always glad one cannot see the shipping here. This seems so far from struggle, from commerce, from competition, from all that make life hard."

"I wonder if it is," the girl said. Was this the same Relief Snow who a few minutes ago could not follow him?

He looked at her hard, but she had stooped to pick up a clam-shell, and was studying intently the bleached and broken fragment in her hand.

CHAPTER XXII

"I say, Conger, you've been long enough in this country to get over some of these Buddhist or Confucianist notions of yours." Galton spoke earnestly. The two men were on their way to Waquanesett by the afternoon Cape train. C. Howe had just returned from a business trip to New York and Galton was going to spend Saturday and Sunday with his parents.

"But these are not notions," Conger argued. "For me it is possible, it is feasible, to hold in one's mind at the same time two conflicting ideas. Once my ideas of a profession, my desire to study one thing and live by another, seemed to you visionary. It was practical."

"Well, that's very different from saying you'd like to marry both Barbara and Bess Grayley," Galton retorted.

"No, it's much the same thing," Conger insisted. "They are so different they complement each other. No, I think the two together, if they could get on together, would make a good wife."

"In the first place," Galton protested, "Bess has nothing that Barbara hasn't, so you'd gain nothing. Barbara has more brains, better disposition, more varied gifts, greater charm, and certainly she's far better looking."

"So?" Conger said reflectively. "I thought, for

example, that Miss Bess appeared more anxious to please. Miss Wrayton never has seemed to me to care much what any one thought of her." And even as he spoke he knew in his heart that he was fighting down his admiration for her because she was Galton's and could never care for him.

"I'm afraid that's pretty near true, Conger. Life has thus far never looked serious to her. It has just been a game. After we're married it will be different."

"She will fall in love with you after you are married?"

"Good Lord, man, I didn't mean that; her love will grow deeper, stronger. She will understand herself and it then."

"Perhaps — but I do not think it."

"You're very exasperating, Conger. What in hell do you think?"

"I think this girl has never found what one calls her heart. It may be that she does not possess the faculty to love. I believe this to be true of many women, especially those highly-bred individuals of the Anglo-Saxon race. Already in this country it is most creditable to be sexless. Some day you may be forced to our — I mean the Chinese custom of several wives lest your race — our race — perish from the earth. Miss Grayley is more human. Now, if I could marry both —"

"Shut up!" Galton interrupted. "I tell you I am going to marry Barbara in a very few months, so you can leave her out of it."

"Galton," Conger said deliberately, "I have watched you now in your wooing these ten years — Miss Barbara may love some day. You she will never love. To marry her without — no; you could not do this!"

"Nonsense," Galton insisted; "don't you suppose I know Barbara?"

"I have watched you," his friend answered, "and I have seen that you do not."

"What an ass you are!" Galton exclaimed, indignantly. "You cannot seem to comprehend that you are not a Chinaman but a Yankee. Your judgment of women is the critical sort that applies to dogs and horses and motor cars — chattels."

"And why not?" C. Howe asked, blandly. "Are wives less important than chattels? Your world has dignified under the title 'affairs of the heart' the commonest animal instincts. Let them become affairs of the head, and you will see less unhappy marriages."

"Bosh!" Galton flung back, petulantly. "You're talking platitudes."

"Platitudes or not," Conger said, "the ideal wife is the composite of three good women. But if the three good women cannot live together in peace — why, one must remain single. Do you know, Galton, if your Miss Barbara Wrayton were really what you claim for her, she might make me a good wife by herself."

"Oh, you old jackass!" Galton laughed, "I believe you have the nerve to be half serious at that. Why, man, she wouldn't look at you!"

A letter awaited Conger Howe at the Waquanesett.

Inn. Its handwriting suggested lack of practice; in spelling it carried reform almost to the point of revolution. The choice of adjectives proved that one may be a church deacon and still employ profanity so long as the user of it does not mean by his damning to consign the thing damned to everlasting perdition. In one sentence the recipient was exhorted, and in the very next he was dared, to visit the undersigned at his house where, as an inducement to call, he was promised "the damdest threshin' you ever seen." It was signed "Respectfully Yours, Theophilus Snow."

"Relief's father," Conger said to himself. "What can have gone wrong there?" Next morning after breakfast he and the yellow dog entered the Snow's yard. Gene was unhitching a giant ox from the heavy shafts of a two-wheeled cart. The wooden yoke, released from its thole-pins, was lifted from the creature's neck, and stolidly as he had borne the weight and toil of his long journey from the weirs, he now began grazing on the nearest grass. To him work meant hunger, hunger food, and food in turn but the preparation for more work.

"How many oxen one sees — even in New York," Conger thought. A girl stood watching Gene. She too had just come from work; her sleeves were rolled up to the elbows. What caught Conger Howe's attention most was the elevated angle of her nose — as if some rude hand had tweaked it upward, drawing after it the short upper lip, leaving shamelessly exposed her very red gums and a crowded disarray of long teeth.

"She is a rodent," C. Howe said to himself, and then was sorry lest she should read his thought. A gray-haired woman who once was pretty appeared in the door of the shed. "Mary M.," she called, "I can't lift that kittle by myself, and it's bilin' over now." Mary M. disappeared into the house.

"Is Captain Snow about?" Conger asked.

"Down t' the fish-house yonder," Gene said, indicating with a thumb over his shoulder the road leading down beside the barn. A hundred yards down this road stood an unpainted shed, and there Conger found the fisherman sorting and packing in barrels with ice the mackerel and tautog that had been his morning's haul. The load had been dumped into a sort of shallow bin, and the big grizzly man in oilers and rubber-boots was sorting the fish into several barrels, stopping every few minutes to pack in more ice. All the large mackerel were kept apart from the smaller ones, and to Conger's surprise even the squid were not thrown away, but went into barrels to be eaten, as he afterwards learned, by the Italians, the foremost of food conservers. As tools the captain used only a pitchfork and a common shovel. Time was precious, and he worked steadily for several minutes before he was aware that he had a visitor. His first word was not a friendly form of greeting: "So you come round to get it, did ye?" The long pitchfork hung balanced in his hairy hands.

"To get what you had to say to me," the young man answered.

"To get a damn sight more'n that!" the Captain re-

torted angrily, taking a stride forward as he spoke.

The yellow dog showed his teeth and growled a warning as he sprang before his master.

"Ye would, would ye!" the fisherman cried, and made a vicious lunge at the yellow dog with his heavy fork. But quicker than the attack, quicker even than the dog's attempt to save himself, was Conger's spring. Something like a galvanic shock intercepted the awkward motion of Cap'n Thoph's arms; something wrenched and twisted them with such a sudden pain that their strength was gone and they were mere ropes of hay. The pitchfork flew into the air, and fell twenty feet away with a startling clatter. The big man, unsteady on his feet, was rubbing his left arm with his right hand. There was no feeling in it from the thumb to the elbow. The place had grown cold and there were black specks floating before his eyes. Then a voice quite calm and low said: "You forget that you are more than twice my age." Gradually the feeling was coming back into the injured arm. "Twice my age," rang in the captain's ears. He knew that he was going to protest: no one need consider his years; he wasn't quite sixty, and could do a day's work with any of 'em. Yet he did not say it. Weakness, faintness, made him feel suddenly old. He had never thought of it before, but perhaps he was ageing a little. The young man was examining the fish still left in the bin. The yellow dog seemed very much surprised when the fish jumped and flapped their tails. He even barked at them; the pitchfork that had almost ended his existence no longer con-

cerned him. That was the past, and his philosophy never went back, even to dig up the bones buried yesterday.

Cap'n Thoph, stumbling heavily forward, sat down on a wheelbarrow. "How did ye do that?" he asked, in a voice that only weakly resembled his own, famous in prayer-meeting hymns for the masterful way it carried the bass.

"That is one of many tricks learned in China and in Japan," Conger said simply, and picked up a squid to see if it could use its peculiar defense out of water.

Cap'n Thoph looked at the lithe and easy figure before him, so confident in its powers, and he knew that he had passed his prime. "What did you wish to say to me?" the young man asked.

"Not to meddle with my little gal," the fisherman declared, regaining a little his proper voice.

"For sixteen years," Conger Howe said, perching on a barrel that afforded a precarious seat, "I was in China an outcast, nameless, almost more a slave than your ox. Life opened for me one of its doors of escape from bondage into freedom, freedom to live my own life, to think my own thoughts, to fashion my own future. Do you think that I could step out from such a life as that was into freedom, and endure to see any other creature, woman, man or dog — enslaved?"

The older man looked into the clear eyes of the speaker, and his own fell before them in shame.

"You mean," he began; then stopped, for the words that should match what he had read in the other's face.

"I mean," Conger Howe caught him up, "that what you allowed yourself to think had never come into my mind."

"I believe ye," Cap'n Thoph said solemnly. "I dunno now why I believe ye, but I do. The gal has worried her ma and me ever since—ye may 'a' heard—"

"Yes, I have heard how ignorant youth is. Youth goes wrong, makes blunders because fathers are too stupid or too prudish to enlighten it. The fault is not youth's; it lies with teachers and protectors who do not teach and protect."

"Seems like you was makin' me out to be the guilty one, 'stead o' her."

"I do not pretend to know," Conger explained. "But if you had not taught her; if you let her find out for herself, you are far more guilty than she ever was."

The big man in his heavy clothes had taken out his knife and sat there whittling a stick. No one had ever suggested such a thing to him. It wasn't so, of course, but these educated people that talked like a page right out of a book were somethin' powerful hard to argue with.

The yellow dog, bearin' no malice, came and sniffed at a smell of dead fish on the big rubber-boots, a smell that had been there long enough to get that quality of age which alone appeals to a dog's sensitive nose as something delightful, something to roll in and carry away in one's coat as a precious memory.

"Say, hev you got religion?" Cap'n Snow asked

suddenly. A new light was breaking on the captain's mind.

"Got religion?"

"Yes — have you found Jesus?"

"I never looked for him," C. Howe said; and when he saw that this shocked the fisherman, he added: "I have a religion of my own, but it has nothing to do with the things you call sacred."

"Hold on there! Stiddy!" cried Cap'n Thoph. "Thar ain't but one God, one Faith, one Salvation —"

"That's where this nation goes astray," the young man broke in. "You boast of your bigness and breadth, and you are as narrow as Italy."

Instead of a torrent of abuse, Cap'n Thoph chose a new stick to whittle, and asked, "Is Italy very narrower?"

"Very!" Conger answered. "But why did you ask about religion?"

"Seemed to me like your words was touched by the Holy Ghost," the big man said simply, and C. Howe sitting there on his barrel mused aloud: "The Holy Ghost — I have not been able to make anything out of that. It is figurative language — probably means the spirit of Goodness."

Cap'n Thoph knew exactly what it meant. The Trinity was as simple as the seasons: simply the Almighty's way of doing business, as he had explained in meeting more than once at great length and to the complete satisfaction of Mrs. Snow. But Cap'n

Thoph sat there and whittled. This man with his dark eyes and his masterful habits and his gentle manner! No! No! it wasn't for such as Cap'n Thoph Snow to tell what he knew to this man.

They sat so long silent that the dog put his paw on C. Howe's knee, which is a dog's way of asking: What next? And Conger patted the dog's head, but said nothing, for the pat is dog language and means: Be patient — and the dog understood it and was patient.

"Relief ain't never b'en convicted o' sin," the captain said after his long meditation. Conger looked puzzled, as he was. Why should Relief be convicted of sin? Aloud he said:

"Sin? She doesn't know what it is."

"I've told her," Cap'n Thoph protested. "It's a parent's dooty. The wrath o' God ain't no —"

"Where the hell is them fish?" a voice interrupted. The form of Gene, the captain's first born, darkened the door. "I've hed the hoss hitched more'n half an hour, waitin'."

Cap'n Thoph rose stiffly from his seat, found his pitchfork and resumed his work of sorting and packing. Gene went back to his horse without another word. There were dark moods when even Gene dared not hurry the old man. He was once more wielding the heavy fork, but his left arm was stiff and there was very little strength in that thumb. The yellow dog wagged a thankful tail, for he loved action, as out from the cool, dark shed Conger Howe and he stepped into the glare of sunshine, and, following

their shadows down the grass-grown road, hurried, eager for the day's work. C. Howe could not fix his attention on anything else until that strange interview had been well thought out, its causes and effects carefully weighed, his future conduct towards the girl determined. No such contemplation disturbed his companion. He had come close, very close to death — but death had missed him. Why look back? With joyous bark and optimistic tail he scurried to and fro, facing the future, living the present.

Conger could still smell the fish, still feel the cool of the fish-house, and see the shiney blue mackerel flopping their final protest against man's carnivorous habits. There was pathos in the figure of the big fisherman forking his fish into the barrels, trying to make himself believe that nothing had happened — nothing except a sprained thumb and a wrenched pride that had suddenly made him humble. What a stupid notion the old man had about his daughter! Why should fathers and mothers always expect their children to fall in love? When they were little the parental solicitation was lest they get run over; later the same anxiety about falling in love. Ridiculous! How Relief would laugh at the idea! "I shall not mention it, however," he decided, "because of what she said about Bess." He fell to wondering just how much he cared for Bess. "I might do worse," he thought, "especially if she cares for me." That confidential revelation given him eight months ago — she hadn't left home, in fact she had never again mentioned being unhappy, and as for the man with whom

she was hopelessly infatuated: "I wonder if it could be?" he asked himself. "And I wonder if this is how a man feels when he is what they call in love?"

CHAPTER XXIII

There was an evening clambake on the beach. Saturday night had been chosen that Galton might be one of the party. Where the bake lay heaped under an old sail-cloth rose a steaming fragrance into the air that told of chickens and corn and lobsters roasting in all that pile of seaweed with the sizzling clams. Cap'n Gragg, who was in charge of the bake, knew to a second when it was done, and his hearty voice summoned all hands to "tumble up." The girls were busy arranging dishes, napkins, wooden plates; opening bottles of olives and ginger pop. The young men came fresh and hungry from a long swim; and all smelt the salty fragrance of the feast and delighted in it even as their ancestors, many centuries before them, when cooking was first invented. And to none did the delectable odors appeal more powerfully than to the yellow dog whose ancestors had remained impartial as to the question of cooking, but whose discrimination was keener than that of any other guest present.

Conger Howe, who, like the yellow dog, had known the full value of good food from all the varied experience of going without any or snatching a hasty bite of what came his way, up to the present calm prospect of repletion, found a seat beside Barbara Wrayton. In fact Barbara had seemed to indicate by a

subtle suggestion of her eyes that he was expected to take that seat.

"You hadn't asked me since you came home about my stories," she said, when a lull in the eating of the clams afforded opportunity for talk. "Aren't you interested — in me, if you couldn't be in them?"

"I had asked Galton, who said all the publishers were dull and blind."

"That sounds as though you were laughing at me."

"But I am not. I see nothing to laugh at."

"So you knew that I had failed — not a publisher who would accept one of my stories."

"And therefore — what?" Conger asked.

"Why, at first," she said frankly, "I was horribly disappointed and bitter. The world didn't appreciate me — and all that sort of thing. It makes me ashamed now to think of that stupid mood. I've been vain. This has opened my eyes to see myself." Suddenly she broke off. "Are you still quite sure we were right — about power being the aim in life?"

He turned to look at her. There was even a new tone in her voice. The self-centred girl by disappointment had found herself and become a woman. A still stronger emotion, stronger than Conger Howe suspected, had been at work quietly but steadily transforming Barbara from something that rippled and danced in the sun into something that could also move calmly because it was deep and strong.

"Your opinion has been changing, then?" he asked. "I, too, from the opposite direction, perhaps, have been coming to the same point. If disappoint-

ment has led you to question life's object, success, the material success for which I strove, has been leading me to mistrust power."

"And in its place you have substituted — what?" she asked, and he confessed:

"I haven't got so far as that — power no longer satisfies. Perhaps you have some explanation."

Nothing could have shown more clearly how Barbara had grown than the distress his confession caused her. His idea of power must have been so much less than hers if he could regard his own business prosperity as worthy of such a title! For that was merely the possession of wealth, and it was hard to picture Conger Howe as caring supremely for that.

"No," she confessed, "I have no explanation — only somehow I'm sure there must be a better object than power. I no longer want power so much as — as I thought I did."

"Possibly," he said, "you have come to feel that what counts most is not what you do, but what you are."

"But," she caught him up, "isn't what you do the expression of what you are? Take your own great patron, Félix Étron, as an example. Would he still be Félix Étron if he didn't paint his pictures? Isn't that his way of giving out to the world the great thoughts that are in him, the appreciation of beauty, the actual power to make even the commonplace beautiful? Think what an inspiration that old Frenchman is to thousands of people, to me who have never seen him, so great an inspiration that I intend to go to

him some day just to tell him what he has meant to me."

"It is not that I wish to belittle his influence," Conger said, lighting his pipe for an after-dinner smoke, "but may it not be that his pictures are to you largely what you yourself put into them? You spoke once of that one that shows a troubled sea, the foreground blurred by driving mist, and a girl down by the water's edge facing the wind and the sea."

"Yes," Barbara said dreamily, recalling the picture vividly, "she wasn't prominent in it. You only felt that she was there too, seeing what you saw, watching perhaps for some sail long overdue, shivering in the dampness but dreading to give it up and turn her back on it. And yet she wasn't the picture; it was the sea and the wind and the mystery of the storm."

"Proving," he said, "that the picture is a success because it doesn't illustrate; it doesn't tell a story; it is a vehicle for the thoughts and imaginations and ideals of such as you who have something to put into it. To come back to our question, it seems to me that it is given to some of us to influence only a few; to others many; what counts isn't the number reached, but the kind of influence exerted. And I have come to believe that the best kind is what we exert unconsciously. Therefore, I say what we are is the important thing, not what we do."

Galton, who had stayed away as long as he thought necessary, joined them here, and Bess Grayley followed him.

"Who furnished the sandwiches?" Galton asked. "Because I'm going to register a kick against mustard on chicken and tongue."

"Oh, don't, please!" Barbara protested. "We are having such an interesting talk, and Conger was teaching me so much!" Then, seeing Galton's disappointment, she was sorry instantly. It was a trifle priggish not to be willing to discuss sandwiches. She did her best to be interested. Galton, however, took her always as he found her. He was prepared to accept her at the altar for better or worse, which alternative seemed to him distinctly a feminine characteristic, a fickle quality which most men escaped in themselves, but had to put up with as the one drawback to married bliss.

Bess Grayley saw the change in Barbara and made a note that Barbara was losing her charm. She had always been one of the coy sort, uncertain with her girl friends, and quite inclined to flirt with her boy friends. Now here she was at twenty-five becoming serious and even bothering her head about abstract questions.

Barbara was going to become one of those cultured women that are so tiresome to their friends. Galton had better hurry up and marry her before she became impossible. This was the first time she had ever heard her call Conger by his first name. It was time to bring matters to a climax with Conger or that strange person might take it into his head to fall in love with Barbara. All this Bess Grayley had time to consider before joining in the conversation.

It was Galton who drew her out by asking why she was so chatty.

"I was going to suggest to Conger this very minute," she said, "that he and I were simply in your way. I know—you needn't protest, either of you—you have very little time to see each other, with Galton up town all summer, and it's the least we can do to give you this cosy evening to yourselves."

"But we don't want to be by ourselves!" Barbara protested.

Conger had started to rise; it was growing dark and he could only dimly see her face, but he felt a detaining hand on his sleeve, more eloquent than words, and he needed no further persuasion to stay. Bess, who hadn't seen this mute appeal, redoubled her efforts to carry her point, and Galton's mild "Oh, nonsense, Bess! You mustn't consider us," was too thinly veiled to serve as a protest.

"Aren't you coming, Conger?" Bess cried, rising with a great deal of unnecessary shaking out of skirts to make her action apparent to all the circle.

The whole company had drawn up around a pretty log fire of driftwood gathered along the shore. Darkness and falling dew had brought just enough of chill to make the fire grateful. A flood tide lapped the beach gently just below them, and the black water beyond the reach of the bonfire's glow was cold and treacherous and full of mystery. Laughter and shouting had given place with the fading light to quiet and subdued conversation.

Conger had felt a tug at his sleeve and to his own

surprise that slight pressure, amounting to no more than a subtle invitation to remain, outweighed the spoken appeal of the girl who up to that very moment had been his best friend. There was in that appeal of Bess's too much of the married woman's brandishing of her marriage license. It was the tone that conveyed a righteous criticism from one authorized to criticize, and it took C. Howe back as by magic to the days in China with his mandarin, to the ideals of China as to marriage and woman's place. It roused the old scorn for the claims of women in America. It was but the flaming up of the embers in a dying flare, but, while it lasted, Conger felt his old repugnance against dominant females and their attempts to run his affairs. Nothing that Bess could say would have moved him while that mood lasted. It was China reasserting itself. Bess was too bright to press for an answer. They were not married yet. Afterwards—that would be very different. He would come when he was called then; but now—one must be so much more gentle in the art of angling than in the more prosaic treatment of the fish that has been securely hooked. So she laughed it off, called him a wayward, self-willed boy, spoiled by long residence in heathen lands. And then she joined the nearest little group, and became the life of the party. She laughed with even more hearty merriment than the humor of the party demanded, so that Conger might note what he had missed, and might appreciate her as the life and soul of any company. Talk among the three thus left was unsatisfactory. Galton and Conger knew each other so well there

seemed to be no need of saying anything, and for reasons of her own Barbara was very quiet.

Some one suggested it was time to go home. The dying fire was left to smoulder and die, to change from a warm, glowing thing of life to dead, cold ashes. Lanterns were lighted to show the road, for the night was very dark now, and in twos and threes the merry company stole back silently from the shore, carrying empty baskets and the dejected dishes that went forth so gaily decked in parsley, now recklessly jolted, unwashed memorials of a joyous past.

Galton was as near to being displeased with Conger as he had ever been. There was no reason why Conger should have stuck to them after Bess Grayley's broad hint that he wasn't wanted. It was simply his obstinacy. Barbara might easily have allowed him to go instead of saying what she did. And to punish them both Galton walked up with Bess Grayley, leaving Conger and Barbara to get on as best they could. They had no lamp, but Conger carried a huge tin pail, and a basket which had contained Barbara's contribution to the supper. In front of them giant shadows stalked along the edge of the woods, tall as the pines, cast by the lantern hung low from a woman's hand as she walked. Barbara clung to his arm that they might not wander from the road.

"Were you amused at my confession of failure?" she asked, gently.

"Amused? No, not that."

"Well, you had a perfect right to be. I'm awfully ashamed when I look back at that ride a year ago when

I asked for your opinion, and then was angry because I got it. My vanity couldn't stand the shock."

"You see, with me it is different from what you think," he said, trying to make it easier for her. "I have not even yet mastered the English idiom so as to express that shade of meaning which I should wish to employ."

"No," she broke in, "I will not have it so. You told me candidly that my story was poor. And it was poor, but I hadn't the decency to bear disappointment, and so — I was contemptible!"

They trudged along for a minute in silence; then he explained.

"It was only natural that you should be annoyed. When one has just finished a piece of work, picture or story or whatsoever it may be, it is so near that its author cannot see over or round it; it fills his horizon for the moment. So he always believes it the best thing he has ever done, when it may be the poorest. After a while it looks different because he gets away from it."

"No apologies on my behalf," she insisted. "These bobbing lights must take you back to Peking. You see you are still in the shadow of Lantern Street."

"I shall always be in the shadow of Lantern Street," he answered, simply, "the gray shadow from which I came."

"Oh, but I didn't mean that!" and, unconsciously, the hold upon his arm tightened.

Barbara Wrayton was no longer the girl whose

thought was always of herself; she had become keenly sensitive for others.

"You needn't fear for me," he said gently; "always there is the shadow, but the sunshine is far stronger than the shadow. And, after all, it must be reason that governs a man, not emotions."

"But emotions are much more thrilling than cold common-sense. It's a pity to tie their hands as long as they behave themselves."

"As long as they behave," he repeated. "But that isn't always the case. They have a habit of not behaving. My first lessons in childhood were by way of covering up every emotion. The man with whom I lived acted always in accordance with his emotions — and they were always vicious. Your emotions tell you only what you would like to do."

"Well," Barbara remarked thoughtfully, "a really nice person doesn't often wish to do what isn't right and proper."

He made no reply, and she asked: "Isn't that so?"

"If that is true, I am not a nice person," he replied frankly.

She thought of his parentage; his Chinese father and more doubtful mother — his early life that must have been spent among the most corrupting influences of a land where Christianity is unknown.

Perhaps he wasn't a nice person, according to the narrowest standards, yet here she was, a girl, virtually engaged to another man, clinging to this man's arm in the dark. Despite this reflection she hadn't thought

of releasing his arm and running ahead to join the group of good reliable Christians whose parentage was vouched for in church records and family Bibles. These confessions had not made him repulsive. Perhaps something was inherently wrong with herself also, for she continued to walk with him, and to hold his arm, and there was no perceptible quickening in her gait.

He had dismissed the emotions in favor of a present sensation that pleased him. "Locust blossoms," he exclaimed, sniffing the cool air delightedly, "and fresh hay raked in windrows and left in the field. I saw it there as we came down. It always reminds me of my mandarin, my first happy days,—my mandarin without whom I should now be a coolie in Peking, dragging a 'rickshaw through the streets, earning about twenty cents a day and living in every other respect the life of a cab-horse."

"Galton has told me about it," Barbara said, with remarkable sympathy in her tone for one who had been so recently asking herself whether she ought to condemn him as a heathen. "But I never thought of it as such a narrow escape. Somehow it seemed to me that, if you hadn't happened upon the blind mandarin, you would have made a place for yourself somewhere, because — well, because you are you."

"That is very kind," he answered, "but I am not at all sure I could have done more than fit into a place if I happened to find it. Making a place in the world is such an energetic job. Galton could do it, with his dominating will."

"Dominating will," she thought. "Is he going to dominate me?" Aloud she asked, "Do you think he will dominate his wife?"

"Why not?" Conger flashed back so suddenly that he hadn't time to check it. The girl was startled; the light hand on his sleeve told him that.

"Do you think," she began, then abruptly dropping the question,— "I forgot — your Chinese ideas as to women's inferiority, and the rights of husbands."

"Fast being remodelled, these Chinese ideas, to suit American customs," he replied, not attempting to debate the question of woman's inferiority. "To go back to Galton, he typifies energy, force — of body and brain."

"In the Bible it wasn't force that could remove mountains, it was faith," Barbara said, and he laughingly admitted,

"I am not so well versed in the Scripture, but I recall that saying. The answer is — no one ever believes it is true. It is like the rich man and the camel's eye — hyperbole the rhetoric calls it."

"You know, it wasn't the camel's eye," she corrected him, wondering whether he was merely being perverse, but he passed it over with the remark, "The particular eye doesn't matter; only, when Americans do not understand the modern Orientals, they call them liars and cheats. They have plenty of excuses for those of twenty centuries ago."

"Have your own way about that if you will," she yielded. "But I find I'm not so keen about strength as I used to be. It's all right among men; they all

worship it, but women like a little weakness here and there. It gives them their chance to be useful. Children and drunkards and sick people and prisoners — they all appeal to us because we can see they need us.”

“Women have always been out of my line,” Conger said. “Ya-tzu was kind to me when I was little, but over here — Bess has been recently concerned for my welfare.”

“And I — a little?”

He made no reply; it wasn't the same thing, this interest of a girl who was completely absorbed in another man's welfare. They had come to the end of their walk, and as he surrendered the pail and the basket to Barbara at her doorstep, Galton was waiting to forgive her for her thoughtless treatment of him. Magnanimity radiated from him, vibrated in the tone in which he thanked Conger for carrying her belongings.

“She is a little lax — always has been,” he explained, “when it comes to remembering her duty to people.”

“For goodness' sake!” she retorted tartly. “Am I already under obligation to you; must I think of duty?”

“Decidedly you must,” Galton answered, firmly.

It was much the same Barbara that she was when Galton had first seen her who rippled back at him with a mocking laugh and, as she disappeared into the house, called, “Don't try that sort of stuff with me! Good night, Conger.” And the front door closed with a bang.

The two friends stood for a moment watching to see

her reappear, then Galton with a show of confidence tried to laugh it off.

"They have tempers, you see, the best of them, and I put it a little too plainly," he said, as they turned away. "A little of your Chinese ideas wouldn't hurt our American girls. A man ought to be the head of his own family; there cannot be two captains aboard the same ship, as my father often remarks."

"But this sounds like heresy from an American," Conger answered. "And as applied to Miss Wrayton, are you not a little premature?"

"It's been going on too long; that's the trouble," Galton confessed. "She grows careless and indifferent, and I cross and exacting. But what's the use of telling you? You don't even think I ought to marry her, but I'm going to marry her — within four months — and this little quarrel will only hasten the day."

Conger made no reply. Lover's quarrels, the treatment due from each to each, the proper conduct of friendship with a woman, were problems outside his knowledge or experience. Nevertheless he had thought lately that he would be happier to have a home of his own, and that meant a wife to preside over it. The picture was not complete without children. Then came the limitation of his possible choice. He knew so few girls! In fact, he knew but one who would be at all likely to listen to a proposal of that sort — for it was as a proposal, not as a suit, that his mind viewed it.

"You are not very communicative," Galton said,

when they had come opposite the Gragg house. "I hope you didn't think I was blaming you."

"Blaming me? You mean for Miss Wrayton's lack of — submission?"

"Oh, you old jackass, I never could explain what I mean. Only I do not in the least blame you — for anything."

They said good night, and Conger went on alone, wondering about marriage and whether he had better try it, also.

CHAPTER XXIV

The cliff directly in front of Myrick's jutted out in a bold promontory. Some winter storm worse than the rest must have torn away the bank on each side of it, leaving this headland for a silent witness to testify to the fury of an angry sea. If Félix Étron himself had approached it from the land one afternoon in July, he would have found there the material for a portrait. A tall man, all in white, stood alone at the very edge of the cliff, his hands clasped behind him, his thick dark hair falling over his forehead, shading a little the thin straight features and the deep set eyes that looked intently seaward. Not a sail was in sight, only a murky cloud low down in the northwest like heavy smoke from a steamer below the horizon. The air was very still and hot. A deep, far-off rumble disturbed the quiet with its long vibration, and the yellow dog that lay panting with dripping tongue, rose and found a new spot where he could lie within the touch of his master's foot. Contact, to the yellow dog, meant confidence, and he hated sharp sounds, in fact he frankly admitted that he was gun shy.

The man appeared to notice neither the distant muttering of thunder nor the close approach of the dog resting against his heel. His thoughts were busy with the settling of a new and vital question that had leaped full grown out of the night, demanding an answer. To his horror he had found himself deeply stirred by

Barbara Wrayton, interested in Galton Gragg's promised bride, and he felt like a thief,—not as the thief feels, hardened to misdeeds, by long indulgence, but as one just waking to discover his own dishonor, starting back from the revelation, shocked at the sight of his naked soul. Step by step, word by word, he had gone back over their conversation, trying to put his finger on the spot where he had left the path of friendship for Galton, had forgotten that Barbara was Galton's, had dared by so much as a thought to trespass upon the sacred ground of his best friend's love for the woman. When he had left her, the sudden ending of their talk had been unsatisfactory; the evident annoyance of Galton had disconcerted him, so it was with mixed feelings that he had undressed and gone to bed and, to sleep, feelings not clearly defined, in which he had as yet seen nothing wherein to blame himself. But in the night while his room was still black he had suddenly wakened to face this grave question, an accusation of disloyalty arising from the darkness to point at him its finger and ask him if he also dared to love Barbara Wrayton. His answer had been ready, a stern denial of any such thought, and as an echo to the denial the whole question had come back in the vision of her face as she said good night—to him but not to Galton—in the light touch of her hand on his arm. There it was; deny it, stoutly as he did, the question remained a question, and the clock on the floor below struck two and three and four while he lay there trying to prove that it wasn't a question at all.

At four it was daylight, and he got up, put on his

Chinese overalls and went out to work in the garden. Years ago he had learned that most ghosts can be laid by the sweat of the brow. In spite of the strenuous labor, the run to the shore and the sea bath that followed it, this ghost had persisted and here he was arguing the whole case from the beginning again in the attempt to prove to himself that no ghost existed.

That bunch of smoke, on the line where sea and sky met, was growing larger, yet not lengthening out as smoke trails in the wind from the funnel of a steamer. This was bunching up blacker and more threatening every minute. The wind came in gusts; it blew the man's hair and his shirt sleeves, but he seemed not to notice that it was blowing.

Sometimes in the early spring when the snow, back on the hillsides, melts and fills the brook with its hurrying stream, a stray bit of driftwood, swirled in the increasing flood, is caught and held for a few minutes in a sharp angle. Here it checks the rush of waters, and, piling up back of it every floating bit, adds its resistance, lifting the water's level to a new height, until suddenly it bursts through at a new point. With a great wave the brook has changed its course, carrying every obstacle before it in its first wild stampede. And the innocent-looking driftwood that was the cause of such violent change — what becomes of that?

The storm was gathering within and without, as Conger Howe stood there facing it, on the cliff in front of Myrick's, and, as the brook sees unmoved the driftwood that is destined to change its course, so Conger Howe spied the figure of a woman coming

along the shore, and gave no more heed to the discovery than merely to note that it was a woman, and that she was hurrying for shelter before the storm should break. For a storm was coming; that little murky cloud had multiplied into a great bank of angry storm clouds from which at intervals shot forth long, jagged streaks of lightning that tore them from top to bottom. Half a minute later followed the sullen rumble of distant thunder, and the woman's skirts down there on the shore were caught in a sudden gale that blew them about her in such a tumult that she could hardly walk. The edge of the storm as it came on across the bay was a curtain of rain, shutting from sight everything behind it. The woman watching it was doing her best to reach Myrick's before it. She had even turned to climb the path by the old spring, when, with a deafening crash, the thunder and the gale broke loose together, and a torrent of rain poured from the rent and shattered heaven. A handful of shingles rose from the tormented roof of Myrick's barn and sailed with the gale far inland. And Conger stood watching the woman struggle towards him up the path, and nothing told him that she was driftwood swirling into the stream of his life at the very moment when its course might be diverted by a trifling accident.

He was staring facts in the face,—the appalling fact that he had for a few hours dared to love Barbara Wrayton. That spark must be stamped out effectually before any one else should even suspect its existence. And the most effectual way to do it was by attachment to some other girl.

Just then Bess Grayley's head appeared over the top of the bank. She was dripping wet, breathless and frightened by the crash and fury of the storm now raging at its height. Her straw hat hung limp and shapeless about her ears, its bright blue ribbons black with water. Her skirt gave forth sundry little streams from its bedraggled folds, and she was shivering. Before Conger could say a word to reassure her, the yellow dog was on his feet, growling and showing a vicious array of teeth.

The yellow dog would not have invited her within Myrick's doubtful shelter, but his master did, and the yellow dog showed his disapproval in his own way. The front end of the studio, when the big doors were shut, afforded at least a dry shelter from the storm. Bess sat on the rough bench and Conger threw over her his coat and a red blanket that served usually for a cushion, but had been known to transform Relief Snow into a beautiful barbarian. Bess was still shivering and alarmed, sitting there well wrapped up, so terrified that she clung to Conger's hand, and he stood beside her to give her confidence. She had taken off her shapeless hat and pressed her head against his side, not unconscious that it was still a pretty head despite its rumpled hair. If either of them had given a thought to the yellow dog they would have noticed that his sensitive nose sniffed once or twice as though it had discovered something. Then they might have seen him walk calmly over to the screen that stood half open in a far corner, where his front half was lost to sight while an expressive rear told by the os-

cillations of his tail that he had found something which pleased him mightily. But the two were quite taken up with each other, with the strangeness of their being thus brought together at a time when a young lady might naturally be frightened, a time when Conger was peculiarly sensitive to appeals to his gallantry.

The flashes and the crashes were coming so near together that it was plain that the storm was directly over them. No wonder the girl found it comforting to lean upon this strong man, to press close against him, to whisper little words of endearment wrung from her unwilling lips in the excitement of the moment. His hand once more stroked the fair hair to reassure her. He hardly knew that he did it, for she was trembling, her teeth were chattering, she was a child in her terror. A wife like this would be a blessing to a lonely man, because she would need him and it is a joy to a strong man to protect those who need protection. This thought was taking form in his mind slowly when she said, "I was frightened. Thunder always frightens me. You are so strong. You'll think me a dreadful baby, but—" A terrific crash that shook the frail building drowned the rest of her sentence. It must have struck very near them, and it only strengthened the desperate grip with which she clung to her protector. If one must die the other could not escape.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he assured her, and she, looking up into his face, declared, "I don't care what comes, so long as — as I have you."

His surprise at so plain a statement showed in a

momentary embarrassment, then something whispered in his ear that this was his opportunity for happiness.

Galton and Barbara would find their little difference settled automatically. Bess Grayley would be a devoted wife, distinctly ornamental, and as Galton's and Barbara's friend she would not separate him from them. That counted for even more than he was willing to admit to himself. Marriage for him would undoubtedly be desirable; his marriage just now would likewise be desirable for all concerned. He was too modest to acknowledge the suspicion that Galton's chances would be improved if he were out of the question. Perhaps it was simply Barbara's innate fondness for conquest, a winning little tendency toward flirtation. While his thoughts were thus calmly ranging the whole field, Bess had caught his right hand in hers, and pressed it to her lips. The golden hair on which he looked down was very soft and beautiful; he could feel her warm lips on his fingers. Fear must have caused her completely to forget all the reserves with which such a girl habitually surrounded herself. She dropped his hand and asked very softly:

"Do you care — a little tiny bit?"

"You mean," he asked, "do I care for you — that much?"

"Yes, do you care — at all?" She was trembling again, violently agitated, as her voice betrayed. The man who knew so little of women, whose mind always harked back to Chinese customs, felt that he was being made love to, and he shrank from the idea, while the

fact under such circumstances was not displeasing. The woman needed him; that was the strong point in her favor. She was afraid, and conventions were forgotten. But she was waiting for an answer, knowing as well as he that the thunder and the storm and the proximity had more influence upon him than any admiration for Bess Grayley's character or accomplishments.

He had never known a similar experience, save that of a year ago with the same woman; he was therefore at a great disadvantage in appraising his own feelings. This seemed like love, was in fact what most people mistake for love at some time in their life.

Before answering he looked down and met her eyes looking straight into his for their answer. They were pretty eyes and they held an intensity at that moment that seemed to tell him that life or death hung on his decision — that their light would go out forever if he admitted that he didn't care — a little.

The change in his estimate of women, gradually as it had come about, was difficult for him even now to appreciate; that a modest woman should take the initiative was extremely distasteful. In spite of this, as he looked into her eyes, he seemed to see the fires beneath them glowing through. His old boyish hunger for love overcame every lesser thought and feeling.

"I care very, very much," he said, and took her upturned face between his two hands. Even to his inexperience the attitude of her lips suggested the expectation of a kiss. Never before had he kissed a woman, but he did so then, and Bess's arms about his

neck prevented it from being of the hurried or perfunctory sort. When he could control his voice to speak he asked,

"Does this surrender mean that I may have you for my wife?"

She smiled at the mention of surrender, for she understood who had been ambushed, understood so well that she was glad the yellow dog couldn't talk; even he must have seen how little Conger Howe had had to do with it.

"Do you really want me for your wife?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I need you, I want you, I want a good woman's love."

She had risen that he might take her in his arms, and from that shelter she now whispered:

"All that I have, all that I am, is yours. Oh, if you only knew how much I need to have some one of my own, some one to look after me, to care whether I am happy or not! My life has been wretched; you will lift me out of it so that I can show some of these cats that they've made a mistake!"

Her voice gained in strength as she went on reviewing her ambitions; its tone jarred discordantly on Conger's dream of love. The tender sentiments, the hopes and confidences that trembled on his lips, ready to find sympathy in this wonderful new intimacy, remained unuttered, not that he consciously refrained from expressing them; love was not so overpowering, so absorbing as he had fancied it. Even in its first grip it left you keenly conscious of your surroundings, almost inclined to be critical, perhaps a little disap-

pointed that a woman didn't seem like an angel. After the first it was she who did the leading, asked whether they should be married at once, how well they could afford to live. He was conscious once more, at this point, of a distinct and disconcerting jar. He felt curiously cold and indifferent about it all, even as he stood there with the pretty blonde head so close to his; in the very climax of the woman's surrender he hardly knew what he was saying, vaguely aware of questions launched, one after another, all inquisitive as to how much the woman was to be paid. At least that was the interpretation that a mocking voice within him insisted upon repeating over and over, as she more and more plainly betrayed her estimate of married bliss and how to measure it.

The storm was over. Once more the sun came out, smiling like a naughty child released from the closet, and the clouds that had wrought such havoc while he had neglected his duties, now scurried off southward, breaking up into harmless little groups that tried to look as though they knew nothing of broken trees, levelled corn fields and devastation. The water still dripped in dozens of places from the drenched roof; it fell splashing into as many little pools and rivulets outside Myrick's barn, and into a few on the inside, one of which was just behind the screen where the yellow dog showed an interest not shared by his master.

Conger noted a ray of sunlight that came through the roof. He thought how the raindrops would glitter and how fresh the earth would smell after such a

rain. He even thought that he should enjoy his supper at the inn. Then once more he was conscious of a great change, a new responsibility, a vague disappointment that he was too loyal to harbor.

"Come," he said almost abruptly; "it is time we were going," and he flung open the big doors.

"Aren't you going to kiss me before we go?" she asked, and he wondered why she seemed to have a grievance, determined that he should be in some way at fault. But he kissed her, and they left the barn securely padlocked on the outside, regardless of the yellow dog's protest that things were not as they should be. And when they were a hundred yards away from Myrick's the yellow dog at his master's heel kept looking back, but the two strange lovers paid no heed to the yellow dog.

CHAPTER XXV

A loose board at the back of Myrick's barn slid to one side, a bare brown foot and ankle stole cautiously out, followed by a blue-checked gingham skirt, wet and bedraggled. Last of all came a very pretty tousled head, brown curls framing a flushed and angry face. But, angry or not, Relief was unmistakably pretty, even when she stamped upon the unoffending grass and cursed Miss Bess Grayley with the everlasting doom of the damned. She was not careful of her language, not sparing the poor man whom she characterized as a silly sucking dove. He was the stupid victim, poor witless man! But all her wrath was for the scheming, sly woman. "I'll kill her first!" she said between her clenched teeth. "She'll never have him, if I have to kill her to stop it! Oh, the snake! The snake!" Her thought ran back to the days of her own temptation and fall. How similar this was to that! Only, that was man tempting, appealing to a simple girl's vanity and love of admiration; this was woman appealing to the gallantry of a man as guileless and unsuspecting as Relief herself had been. It was nothing but an emotional response to the situation, and Relief, who had no words for it, recognized this fact. To her it was plain that Conger Howe was not at all in love with Miss Grayley; she even went so far as

to suspect that he was in love with Barbara Wrayton, and in that she was dangerously near the truth, save that his loyalty to Galton would not suffer him to confess it even to himself. In any event one thing became clearer to her than ever before: the utter hopelessness of her infatuation for the artist who had seen in her only a picturesque model, while she saw in him the divinity who possessed in one person every adorable attribute. With such a being it was impossible to be angry; his ignorance and stupidity about women only made him the more attractive.

She had almost reached home when she heard voices just ahead. A man said: "My hearty congratulations, old chap; this is delightful. What fun we four can have together!" Relief left the path and, skirting it through the bushes, came close to them where she could see and hear quite unobserved. It was Galton Gragg who had spoken, and Miss Wrayton who was with him didn't appear to share his enthusiasm. She seemed to Relief to be looking reproachfully at the artist, almost scornfully. The only one of the four wholly at ease and blissfully happy was Miss Bess Grayley. Evidently she hadn't lost a minute in announcing her engagement. The man wasn't going to escape her now that she had trapped him. "I dare say the cat will lead him to the parson on her way home, and have the knot tied before he can have time to think it over." So Relief's thoughts ran while two of the four continued to express the usual vague and optimistic sentiments concerning marriage in general and this coming one in particular as an example of utmost

fitness. Plainly enough the event, which was a divine inspiration as seen by Miss Grayley and Galton, was an embarrassing surprise to the artist and a shocking disappointment to Miss Barbara.

"You see," Miss Grayley said, in her liveliest manner, "it took Conger some time to discover it because he is so modest, but I've known what he really thought about it for weeks. The poor dear old goose couldn't conceal it from me."

This speech had far from the desired effect on Conger. He looked more disturbed and perplexed than ever. This air of ownership was distressing him. Relief Snow, who wasn't in their class, could see it. She knew him a good deal better and sympathized with him far more than these friends of his who looked down on her as not good enough for them to notice.

"Now come, Conger," Miss Bess continued, "I want to break the news to the summer colony before" — and, hesitating here for the right word, she lost her advantage, and Barbara Wrayton finished her sentence: "Before C. Howe has time to revert to his Chinese ideas of women as chattels?"

At this sally Bess only laughed. She well knew that those old Chinese notions were gone, and in their place she was to teach him that equality of the sexes meant the rule of woman. Barbara never glanced at her, however; she was studying that puzzled look on Conger's face which had deepened to an ominous frown. China was not so far behind him as Miss Grayley thought. All this the unhappy Relief saw and understood. She saw also the quick look with which

her artist answered Barbara Wrayton, that it was a sudden appeal to her to understand what he was doing and why. This was much for a simple country girl like Relief Snow to see and comprehend, but suffering and disappointment had taught Relief many things about human nature. Her heart had always been open for love, open in vain it would seem, now her eyes and mind were open likewise to the things that concerned love.

If Barbara Wrayton shared what Relief saw in C. Howe's glance she did not gratify his appeal; instead she laughed the careless rippling laugh that was half merriment, half a challenge, and asked of Bess, "Are you going to have him keep on with painting and picture-selling, or shall you have him go into another business?" Conger winced under this, but not a look betrayed that he caught the point, and Bess, accepting it as a tribute to her right to command, answered frankly: "My dear, we haven't been engaged fifteen minutes yet—it's too soon to plan every detail. But one thing I will tell you: I mean that he shall make the most of what ability he has."

Even Galton noted the new tone of command in this declaration and instinctively sought in his friend's face the sympathetic scowl to mark his abhorrence of it which on any previous occasion would surely have been there. Only the old puzzled look was between Conger's eyes, and Galton, translating it into terms of conquest, put his hand on Conger's shoulder and said: "You have a very bad case of it. I thought I was pretty hard hit, but you are a transformed

creature. Only don't let it go too far; I should hate like the devil to see you lose all your independence and your fine old heathen notions of what's what."

Conger didn't answer this friendly rally. His deep eyes were watching the duel flashing in rapier glances between the two girls who had so long been friends that words were not needed. Why were they angry with each other? Why weren't they all the better friends now that this definite pairing off had removed all possibilities of jealousy? This was puzzling him; what he had done had apparently already fallen far short of his expectations, and he began to fear that his years of observation and training in America had, after all, taught him but little of American women. He had been prepared in his first reaction against the Oriental views to accord to woman an exalted position as high above her deserts as the other was below it. Now suddenly he saw her revealed simply as a human being, neither below nor above man, dependent simply upon her education and environment. Once more he must change his whole attitude towards life. For his first ten years life had been something to be endured stoically, because to show suffering was but to invite worse. Then little by little had come revaluation, new ideals, purpose and zest. Now, by this newest revelation, he could see that Bess Grayley had mistaken his reverence for servility; his modest admiration of woman for cringing admission of his own inferiority. Like Samson, his next step, after giving woman her way with him, had been to pull the whole temple down about his ears.

Relief Snow had gone, her anger against Miss Grayley hotter than ever, her failure to comprehend the artist's position only half as complete as that of the two young ladies who were his friends, but still a very distinct failure to see things as he saw them. The Snow family had finally accepted the situation and with it the pay that Rill earned by her posing. Cap'n Thoph had been very sparing of details in discussing it with his wife. He had entirely omitted mention of that little incident at the fish-house; it was easier to ignore the interview than to explain how it resulted. But he did say that he had "changed his mind about that artist feller an' he 'lowed no harm'd come to Rill along o' him."

"Wal, I hope not," said Mrs. Snow. "It does seem's though one sech disgrace is enough fer a lifetime. But she's awful took with him, Thoph, kinder moonin' like, an' goin' off by herself, an' lookin' fer away. It's a bad sign with a girl, leastways them as ever I knew."

"But it takes two to make love, same as to quarrel," her husband sententiously remarked.

"Thoph," Mrs. Snow replied, "sometimes it does seem like you didn't hev reasonable common sense. If the women folks is ready an' willin' when it comes to love-makin' there ain't never no dearth o' men to jine 'em — married or single — it don't make the least difference. Two to make love? Permission is all the men folks wants, an' they'll do the makin', night or daytimes, weekdays or Sundays. You can't tell me nothin' 'bout men."

Twice Theophilus Snow attempted to reply; his dignity was shocked — the wife of a deacon uttering such sentiments as these! He got as far as standing very straight, raising his hand and clearing his throat, which was his usual procedure when he rose in prayer-meeting. Then he thought better of it. Mrs. Snow was different from a prayer-meeting. She might answer back. So he frowned at her prodigiously and ventured not a word.

It was at this juncture that Rill walked in, flushed and out of sorts, flopped down in the rocker facing her mother who was ironing a Sunday shirt, and exploded: "What d'you think that silly thing's gone an' done, Ma? Got engaged to that she cat Grayley. Didn't even see that it was all her doin'. Jest fell for it! Oh Lord, it fair makes one sick! And she hangin' round his neck till he had to — like Jacob rastlin' with the Lord" —

"Now see here, Rill," her father interposed, "you just leave the Lord out o' this. It ain't fer sech as you to be drawin' him into the argyment."

"The Lord ain't takin' no hand in this," Relief flung back. "It's the devil's work, pure an' simple. Pure an' simple — that's a good description of Mr. C. Howe."

"I ain't so sure," Mrs. Snow said, replacing one of her irons on the stove and testing another by holding it near her cheek.

"Listen, Ma!" Relief got up and stood at the other side of the ironing-board. She seemed to have forgotten her father's presence. "That man ain't

thinkin' about himself, the way other folks do; say, I seen him stand up fer an hour because that yaller dog was takin' a nap in his chair an' he wouldn't disturb him. If I was a queen he couldn't be no politer to me than what he is. An' now he's marryin' that critter to save her feelin's. Well, you watch me, Ma; I ain't goin' to allow no sech sacrifice. It's worse'n Abraham layin' Isaac on the altar."

"Careful, Rill!" the old man interrupted. "We don't want no blarsphemin'."

"It ain't blaspheming; didn't the Lord provide a ram caught in the thicket to take poor little Ikey's place? Well, who's goin' to be the ram this time?"

And with that Relief defiantly marched up the back stairs to her own room, but her mother knew that she was desperately in earnest and fighting to keep back the tears.

For once Cap'n Thoph launched no invectives after his wilful daughter, and no tiresome argument followed her outburst. Mrs. Snow 'lowed that he was softenin' with age jest as her father done thirty years back.

Upstairs the carpet was being turned back in one corner, and the letter from Tacoma came out once more from its hiding to be read very carefully through, then as carefully restored to its retreat, after which Relief still sat there on the floor, looking at the carpet that concealed it. Before her eyes floated the image of Conger Howe, now addressing her in his friendly, boyish manner, now working at his easel or playing with the yellow dog. Finally, she could only

picture him as he stood there holding Miss Grayley in his arms, and offering himself a sacrifice to make life easier for her and his friend Galton Gragg. Gradually the truth about it all seemed to dawn upon her, and she got up with white but resolute face, put on her Sunday dress and quietly left the house. The guests at the hotel were just finishing supper when Relief Snow appeared on the piazza, inquiring for Dr. Doon who wasn't there and had no occasion to be there. One excuse was as good as another, so long as it permitted her to loiter without attracting suspicion. When Miss Bess Grayley strolled over casually to tell the news, Relief kept out of sight, but not out of hearing. She was next concerned to find her artist and to find him immediately.

C. Howe was in the billiard-room alone, practising on the table which his munificence had recently equipped with new cushions, and which was never even groomed except when he brushed it. Relief noticed there were only three balls on the table, and that he seemed to possess that peculiar charm by which certain men can with perfect ease coax the white ball to perform miracles with the other two and an intervening cushion. She knew nothing of touch and co-ordination, but grace and lithe ease she knew because they were natural to her. For a minute therefore she stood in the doorway admiring the relaxed and careless attitude of the player and his skill at the game; then she advanced boldly.

"May I speak to you?" she asked.

"Yes, certainly, Rill; is anything wrong?"

"Yes, there is — but I don't know how to tell you. Will you come out here where we can be alone?"

Conger Howe watched her sharply. He had never seen her like this. She was plainly distressed, yet he hesitated to question her. They found seats on the piazza at the far end quite isolated.

"Well," he said, "now tell me as much or little as you wish. I'll do anything in my power to help you."

Some one was talking just round the corner.

"Listen!" Relief said, and laid her hand on his sleeve.

"He's been crazy about me for weeks — just simply hounding the life out of me to marry him. You know what I mean. My family have always thought so much about breeding that I could hardly bear to think about that side of it — but I propose to make the name Howe worth something one of these days. I don't propose to have him spend his life dawdling around trying to learn to paint —"

"But, Miss Grayley," a girl's voice interrupted, "isn't Mr. Howe earning a fine living as agent for the great Félix Étron?"

"He is just now," Miss Bess admitted, "but you can't tell how long a snap like that will last. I mean to have my husband in a regular business where he can make money and reputation. He has youth and health and an amiable disposition — I guess we can make an American of him."

Like a little boy Conger put his hand in that of the girl sitting beside him. Together they rose from the bench and hand in hand walked back to the billiard-

room. Neither spoke, but in the light of the single kerosene lamp over the table Relief saw that his face was very pale, his lips were firmly pressed together, and his eyes looked at something very far away. He had released her hand when they got inside the door. Presently he picked up his cue and began to play, but the white ball no longer clicked gently against each of the other two. Somehow the white ball had lost something of its magic. And so Relief left him in silence, and the twilight swallowed her up, blending her slim figure with the pitch pines on her road home.

"Never mind," she said to herself, "somebody had to show him, an' I'm glad I done it."

CHAPTER XXVI

At one o'clock the following day Major Thornton walked up and down the corridor of his club, nervously awaiting his son's arrival. A telephone message had advised him that Conger wished to see him, and the major, who hadn't so much as seen or heard from Conger for two months, was apprehensive. There had been sufficient warning of trouble even in the tone of the voice that came over the telephone making this appointment.

Promptly at one he came. He looked pale and agitated. His father, scenting money difficulties, secretly welcomed this opportunity to show his boy how much he loved him. In the dining-room they found a table overlooking the Common where waving elm trees, green grass and the great flaring fountain of the Frog Pond gave the hot city a taste of real life, recalling the days when Boston's citizens pastured their cows on this same Common, under these very trees. By police indulgence a score or more of ragged urchins were even bathing in the pond, and Major Thornton, pointing to them, said:

"Conger, you don't need to go to Cape Cod for freedom. See what you can do in the heart of Boston."

"Showing, sir, that freedom isn't a matter of place

or time, but is chiefly a state of mind. And that's what I wanted to see you about, sir."

The major eyed him attentively, but said nothing.

"I am upset by reason of the uncertainty, the cloud involving my parentage. Foundlings are looked upon, I find —"

He stopped short. The major's face had gone scarlet, and from scarlet to a strange pallor. The major's heart was acting very badly, and the young man, fearful that he had seemed to be lacking in respect, hastened to reassure him.

"I know, sir, that it has never made the least difference to you, and I remember I was given to understand by the colonel when you took me up in Peking that I need not be ashamed of my parents. But sir, your countrymen are so full of superstitions that the phrase 'What God hath joined together' has more weight with them than all the common sense and biology combined. And the lack of knowledge about my birth is by many so great a prejudice that it amounts to a divine visitation, God being very angry because possibly he wasn't invited to the wedding."

"You shouldn't say such things," the major replied, feebly. He had put down his knife and fork, and from time to time took a swallow of water, then gazed out at the Common, which was no longer very green, and by no means suggested freedom.

"I understand," Conger went on, "that in fairness to my parents their identity couldn't be disclosed, so I'm not asking such a thing. But I can ask whether you know, of your own knowledge, that they were of

such character that I should not be committing a fault to marry — to bring into the world grandchildren of my father and my mother.”

Major Thornton's hand shook perceptibly as he raised his glass to his lips before attempting to reply. His mouth was very dry, and the hungry look in his eyes was strangely tragic for a man who had merely adopted a foundling, hadn't even made the adoption a legal contract for his wife's sake. But Conger Howe saw only the sympathy that he himself could feel towards any living thing, so no inkling of the truth came to him. At last the major said:

“You need have no such scruples or doubts. Your mother, I know, my boy, was a sweet, a pure, a lovely girl, and your father was — a gentleman. Very young they were, impulsive, and your father in the heedlessness of youth did the girl a great wrong. It was wholly his fault — but repentance doesn't bring back the dead. Thank God there is such a thing as forgiveness for sin!”

“But is there?” Conger answered, then checked himself, for the major's sympathy was causing great beads of perspiration to stand out on his forehead. His luncheon, untasted, had grown cold on his plate. Could another's tragedy cause such suffering as Conger could see back of those eyes that looked so appealingly into his? Some gleam of a possible truth reached him in that mute appeal. Instantly his whole manner changed.

“That is enough for me to know,” he exclaimed, “that I need not fear to have children. To me it

would seem the unpardonable sin to transmit to one's children a taint, physical, mental or moral. And if you know that my parents were like other people, irregularity as to marriage is nothing, nothing at all, a mere convention often binding together those who would be far better and happier apart."

The major was looking out of the window again, across the Common and the Public Garden and the Back Bay where Boston's conventions and creeds and prejudices are held in highest honor.

"Conger," he said, "you may not call yourself a Christian, but you hold and practise the very best that our religion teaches."

"And those things," Conger replied, "are the eternal truths that your religion holds in common with many others. I ought to tell you, sir, that I have been guilty of a great indiscretion: I have engaged myself to Miss Grayley."

"An indiscretion?" the major repeated. "I don't follow you. She is a lovely girl, and you are earning money enough to support her handsomely. Where is the indiscretion?"

"It seems, sir, that I have run my neck into a feminist noose. I am to be her husband; not she my wife. I have overheard her expounding how she hopes to make something out of me yet—a stock broker, or a railroad magnate, I judge, is her ambition. I had gathered that here marriage was a partnership. Behold, it is but a reversal of our Chinese custom: here man becomes the chattel. I am in the slang vernacular, facing it."

Major Thornton was forced to smile at Conger's idea of slang, but his idea of marriage was another and a closer problem. The major well knew how it worked in his own home. "If you've discovered that sort of thing already, why don't you back out? It's a good deal better than going on with it. Marriage, to be a success, requires first of all an enthusiastic start. Love, my boy, is one of the most complicated ailments flesh is heir to. You can't let nature have her way with it or nature will work a cure, and that is just what you don't want. By repeated inoculations you can keep the germ alive in the system, and those inoculations are the successful efforts to attract and win one's mate."

"Conscious efforts?" Conger asked.

"Certainly, conscious efforts, as were the girl's desire to look attractive, to be sweet and womanly; and his to be strong and brave and just and honest in her eyes — when they first met."

"That is not a universal practice even in America," the young man commented, and his father, with a wise shake of the head, admitted:

"Most of us discover it too late. Like so many of our proved theories, it is seldom really given a fair trial; but, if you have found Miss Grayley what you say, don't let any mistaken notions of gallantry mislead you into marrying her, or you'll be wretchedly unhappy — both of you. How long a trial have you given it — the engagement?"

"About fifteen minutes, sir."

"Fifteen minutes!"

"Yes, sir, at the end of that time she disclosed her real self for the first time, and her attitude towards marriage. Since then I have heard her amplify the topic, though she didn't know I was hearing — and all of this was yesterday afternoon, so you see I have had but a short and sharp engagement."

"Are you quite sure, Conger, that you are not misled by appearances?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Then you should lose no time in undoing your mistake before news of it has travelled."

"It is so complicated a problem," the young man answered enigmatically, and the other, who knew how tangled matrimony might be, did not question him. So many paths may lead to marriage, so many reasons good and bad. His present anxiety was that his son might be spared the sorrow of an unhappy union. His ideas of duty were so chivalrous that it would be altogether like him to decide that having proposed marriage he must stick to it, however bad the bargain.

That evening Conger called on Bess, and found her in a state of mind bordering on temper.

"Where on earth have you been?" was her greeting. "You offer yourself; I accept. We walk home — and you disappear, drop out of sight. When a girl announces her engagement she wants at least to have the man to show them. What became of you? If you felt embarrassed why couldn't you at least —"

"Bess," he said, ignoring the space she had dextrously left beside her on the sofa, and standing before her, "I have made a monstrous mistake. I

ask your pardon. The fault is wholly mine — I should never have spoken to you of marriage — I —”

It was her turn now to interrupt. Her face had become so pale that even her lips were white. He had never before noticed how thin her lips were or how straight was the line of her mouth. It even flashed through his mind that he had never before seen her mouth closed. She was standing, facing him, and her hands were tight clenched. She was not even pretty in this mood.

“How dare you?” she panted. “Do you think you can treat me like — like one of your own kind? You! You of all men! The dishonored, disowned son of some Chinese — woman of the streets!” He heard her thus far, and suddenly memory brought before his eyes the Rat’s garden in Peking, the stone wall enclosing it, the precious egg that he was saving for Ya-tzu, the fierce fight that followed, and its lesson in self-control. He no longer heard the torrent of denunciation and abuse, but when she paused for breath, she met in his eyes a scorn and a reproach that frightened her into silence.

“If I had been in doubt before,” he said steadily, “this outburst would have convinced me.”

And with that he left her standing there very white and very angry and not a little troubled, for she was far too bright a woman to mistake this for a lovers’ quarrel. In denouncing him, as she had, there remained no possibility of explanation and reconciliation. “What a fool I was!” she reproached herself, in this first panic after he had gone. “How am I

ever to face the crowd? They all know of it by this time. Oh, why was I in such a hurry to brag of it! There must be a way out. I must have a hold on him." By this time she was seated again, tapping the floor with a trim but impatient foot, and looking about her as though expecting to find a way of escape marked "exit." Suddenly she found it; the color came back to her cheeks with a rush. "I'll show him yet whether he can play fast and loose with me," she whispered. "I'll punish him, but I wouldn't marry him if he came to me on his knees! A nice income he'll have to offer the next girl!"

And while she was storming, blaming her own indiscretion, and planning a fearful revenge upon him, Conger Howe was on his way along the shadowy path to the shore, lighted only by a fitful moon but followed close by his devoted dog.

The night air was soft and balmy; the tide was out, and in the shallow pools out on the flats the moonlight shone like silver. So calm and restful was the scene that Conger sitting on the old bench in front of Myrick's could forget the smart of his recent hurt, could ignore the memory of his last interview here. But as usual since early childhood he was glad of solitude to review his own past, to satisfy himself whether his conduct had been up to his own standards. Shame seemed always to travel close behind him. He remembered his shame when, as a little boy, people called attention to his color, and even accused him of being white. How strange all that seemed now! How easily his point of view had later shifted until he felt

it a disgrace to be half Chinese, and how happy when he was assured that his parents were both white! And now Major Thornton had farther removed shame from his consciousness by his assurance that father and mother were perfectly respectable, decent people; in fact, it would seem from what the major said that they were something better than that. Step by step he looked himself over and brought himself down to this ill-advised, precipitate engagement and disengagement. He wondered whether he could call it that, whether he had extricated himself or was enmeshed deeper than ever. With a shudder he reviewed his somersault from the Oriental attitude towards woman to the hen-pecked American, and how near it had come to wrecking him.

"All my ideas seem to need constant revision and correction," he mused. "So recently I believed the object of my life was power. I know now that it is not — but I am not sure what it is."

The moon, which had been playing hide and seek, came out frankly, shamelessly, to be admired. She was behind him, but she revealed a figure coming along the beach, swinging with the long, graceful stride of youth, health and the habit of locomotion. At first he couldn't make out whether it was man or woman; then, as it drew nearer, a white skirt was visible and a very feminine hat worn with feminine courage at a daring angle. She paused when she came to the bluff, then, turning, mounted the path to Myrick's. Not long ago in a storm he had waited on this very spot for a woman to come to him up that path. Could this

by any chance be the same woman? He assured himself that she could not have distanced him; he had left her in her home and had come straight down here. No, it couldn't be she. Meantime some woman, young and vigorous, was mounting the steep path.

"She must be an intrepid lady," he said to himself, "out alone at this time in the evening. Not that there is the slightest danger down here, but women don't like the dark."

He sat still, but the yellow dog's tail was vigorously heralding the arrival of a friend. How much their noses tell them that is denied to us!

Her head appeared. She saw him and gave a little cry of surprise; then the dog went forward to reassure her, and Conger, not to be outdone, spoke.

"It is very lovely and peaceful here, to-night."

"Why, Conger," she cried, "is it you?"

He wasn't quite sure whether she had ever called him Conger before; possibly he wouldn't have noticed whether she did or not. Now, even the tone of her voice was a delight. She was no longer the careless Barbara. Something had still further changed her, something intangible, that made her his friend.

"Will you sit down?" he asked, rising to make room for her. He didn't ask why she was roaming the shore alone, and his delicacy in betraying no curiosity was gratefully appreciated.

Sitting there beside him on the bench, and swinging her feet like a child, her artless sincerity drew him out, instantly breaking down his usual reserve so completely that he welcomed the opportunity to talk about himself.

"I suppose," she began, "I'm in a silly mood to come down here alone this way. It wasn't sentiment, you know; it was restlessness, and —"

"Curious, you should have said that," he replied, in his simple direct way, "because I have just broken with Bess after a thirty hours' engagement. Almost establishes a record, does it not?"

"What? Broken it? Why, pray? Oh, it's only a misunderstanding, and —"

"No, the misunderstanding came before the engagement. Now we understand each other thoroughly."

"Marriage is a great mistake anyway," Barbara said. "Just how the race could go on without it I don't know. Nine women out of every ten marry simply because they want children, the tenth because she wants a home. Are you shocked?"

"Shocked? No!"

"Galton, of course," she went on, "is the nicest, the least objectionable of the sex, but the whole scheme of double harness is hideous! Why, if I were married I couldn't do this. The rotten world would wag its head and ask: 'Whom is she going to meet?'"

"Would it?" he asked, sincerely interested.

"Yes, it would, and what is more, my husband, who, when not at his office, would be under my feet every minute, would be furious; either he would be jealous or shocked at my doing what his mother never did."

"But you cannot generalize about husbands," he protested; "not all men are cut out from the pattern you describe."

"Come now," she insisted, "do you know what is

going to happen between you and Bess? She will take all the blame and you will let her. Doubtless you were domineering, also jealous, but you will justify yourself. It was all for her sake. It was to save the woman from entangling alliances and all that sort of thing."

"I cannot see your face," he answered calmly, "but I do not need to. It always seems to me the twinkle in your eye betrays you; that you are only masquerading — as you are now."

"I wonder if I am," she said, "or just being disagreeable to irritate you into an outburst"; then, after a minute's silence, "I'm sorry. It isn't any fun being hateful to you. Galton would come at me, hammer and tongs, and then we should have had a quarrel. It was your fault with Bess, wasn't it? Were you flirting?"

"Flirting requires a greater degree of skill than I possess," he said. "Besides, I fancy it is too subtle for me; I do not apprehend its object. Always I either do or I do not. The flirting seems to be something that is half of each, and I fail to grasp it."

"Why, you flirted with me, desperately, the night of the clambake."

She could not see the quick rush of color to his face; she could only hear the troubled protest: "No! You mistake — I never forget that you are Galton's, and that he is my best friend."

"What has that to do with it?" she asked, so suddenly that he was startled. "Couldn't you flirt with the wife of your best friend, or his promised wife?"

If I ever am Galton's wife I shall flirt with every attractive man I meet. That's the only fun a married woman can have, and it's little enough to pay her for wearing the shackles. If you want an aphorism for marriage it is: Shackles for shekels. That's the real exchange."

"I have never before seen you in this mood," Conger said almost reproachfully. "In any one less merry and kind it would seem like cynicism; in you I feel sure it is some momentary irritation, or else having your fun."

"You disapprove, yet you defend me. Why?" she asked, turning to look at him. The moonlight showed him a very lovely face, unmistakably on the verge of tears. Something, then, was wrong with her, also, and she too had come alone to the shore to let the fresh sea air blow through it. He could sympathize with that point of view, but her anxieties must be trivial. Perhaps publishers continued to be heartless and blind.

"I am very fond — that is, I think very highly of you. And still more I value your friendship because you are Galton's," he said, and she flung back:

"Galton's. There you go! Ownership!"

"No, no, not ownership," he insisted. "His by attachment, just as he is yours."

"Well, attachment isn't enough to marry on." Her manner had changed. She was no longer flippant; her voice shook with the attempt to control her emotion.

"Conger, I'm worried to death over it. Galton is getting impatient, and I cannot marry him. It isn't

in me to love any man. I hate to tell him, after keeping him waiting for years, but I am convinced I'm incapable of love, and without it marriage would be frightful. Why I tell you I don't know — unless it's because you are his best friend."

They sat a few minutes in silence, thinking it over. Then Conger said, "We had better be going." His voice sounded strange; his thoughts had been hard to keep strictly loyal to his friend. Just as that night of the clambake he knew that he loved her, and not to admit it even to himself was a struggle. He had caught at Bess Grayley, imagining that love was transferable. He had learned his mistake already.

In the shade of the trees it was hard to keep to the path. It was all very familiar to him, and he could find it in the dark. Several times he had to take her by the hand, and lead her, and every time the touch of her hand in his deprived him of the power of thought or speech save the guilty consciousness that even this was heavenly and incomparable bliss. He longed to tell her very simply and frankly that, in spite of Galton, in spite of her reiterated assertion as to her own indifference and coldness, he loved her. It would clear the air; it would be better and safer for her to know it. She, too, was very quiet. What were her thoughts, he wondered. Were any bestowed on him?

They came out into the open fields where they could see the pond signalling back to the stars and the clouds above it, repeating to each its own message faithfully reproduced. He wondered if she would say that the pond was an ideal wife. Instead:

"I heard to-day from that painter man in New York, Monsieur Beauchamp. He is a frothy person, vain and artificial, but very amusing and besides he is a very dear friend of my beloved old Félix Étron."

"Old — yes — but why beloved?" he asked.

"Can't you see it in his pictures?" she retorted. "The understanding, the sympathy with all that lives, the insight and the mystery of it all? I believe if he wasn't eighty I could marry him — if he would have me."

"He could be a grandpa to you, and let you play in his studio — when you were very good."

"Which only shows," she declared, "that you do not understand — me — or the wonderful artist who has made you."

They parted at her gate, both very quiet, occupied with their own thoughts, and his presently took him back again to Myrick's and the solitude of the shore.

CHAPTER XXVII

M. Beauchamp was becoming prominent in the world of art. His pictures were attracting more favorable notice, and the critic who had likened his impressionist view of "Bald Mountain at Sunset" to a Dutch cheese rampant now began to see real value in M. Beauchamp's performance. Twice had he appeared in headlines in the New York papers, the immediate cause being a letter from no less a celebrity than Félix Étron. In the interview accorded the leading dailies M. Beauchamp had generously gone somewhat into details concerning the great painter, his life, his personality and his ideas. "I used to think," M. Beauchamp told the reporters, "that a man was old at seventy; that if at sixty he hadn't arrived his case was hopeless. Now my friend Félix Étron comes to show me that your great genius may be beyond eighty before he finds himself. Don't you see how much of value this adds to life, this prolongation of its usefulness, this uncertain, indeterminate period of its climax! When may a man safely give up the struggle, saying to himself, 'My day has come and gone, and behold the night cometh'? Surely not until his eyes are closing in death; not until his arms hang listless at his sides, and his brain no longer conjures up for him those images which are the basis of all thought, the

accompaniment of all our conscious hours, and the fabric of our dreams."

Much of this was copied verbatim from the letter of Félix Étron, in which occurred also this passage:

"In answer to your question I could no more give a rule for painting pictures than for preventing baldness. To some it seems to come naturally, but I am convinced that only they who feel life keenly, deeply, can portray it vividly. Those who see only the surface give you just that on their canvases. Small wonder if they fail to satisfy and are soon forgotten. It is the deeper something that speaks to us in nature. If we can put some of that into our pictures they will live."

M. Beauchamp had been good enough to enclose a clipping of his interview in a letter to Barbara Wrayton. In that he further amplified his topic, explaining that he had addressed a letter to M. Félix Étron at Paris six weeks ago in the hope of drawing his friend into a discussion of his own career. The reply, which had only just arrived, quite ignored the most salient of his questions, as M. Beauchamp expressed it: "with a characteristic modesty which forbids the dear old master to talk of himself even to me." M. Beauchamp always allowed one to infer that he was a pupil as well as an intimate of the great painter, but nothing in his pictures bore any testimony to that effect. The bizarre, the self-conscious straining for appearances, which characterized his work, were at the opposite pole from the sincere straight-forward methods of Félix Étron.

Barbara had the letter in her pocket when she met

Conger at the post office shortly after their chance meeting at Myrick's, and she read him that portion which dealt with his patron, considerably omitting the passage which declared: "You are at liberty to show my interview with the reporters to your friend Mr. C. Howe, but you needn't tell him that I suggested to Étron that I could do a great deal better by him if he would transfer to me the sale of his pictures on this side the Atlantic. I expect very soon to receive his acceptance of my proposition."

This rather troubled Barbara. She liked Conger, and she knew that without the commissions on his sales his income would shrink from its princely level to extremely humble proportions, so she asked, by way of stimulating him, "Do you think you are devoting as much energy as you ought to the business of your agency?"

"Just how?" he asked, and she tried to explain:

"I mean, do you try hard enough to get the best results for your patron—so that no one could step in and take the business away from you? Do you, perhaps, give too much of your time to your own work which is, after all, just an avocation, isn't it?"

"Oh, I see," he said; "about such things one never knows."

And Barbara felt that she had made a failure of her attempt to warn him, yet feared it would not be fair to tell him why she had spoken. He read her clipping from the *New York Sun* and returned it to her with no other comment than a Chinese "Ho!" which might be anything, she thought, from surprise to indifference,

— save for the contraction of those two lines between his eyes, an interrogation — no, rather an admission of doubt.

“Why shouldn’t you have been the one to furnish this interview,” she went on, “perhaps I should say to grant it, instead of Monsieur Beauchamp?”

“I know it,” he said, which, after all, was no more satisfactory and definite than his scowl. But he did show his interest in her by continuing the conversation long after he might easily have escaped, and neither the attraction of Myrick’s nor his allegiance to the garden was sufficient for the next two hours to drag him from the Wraytons’ piazza where Barbara held him by a magic spell that, if half indifference, was at least half the instinctive impulse to attract the male.

Galton was back in the city hard at work to put himself into a position where he might support a wife in such style of living as would not call for excuses to friends and apologies to her. Despite his loyalty to Conger, it did annoy him a little to see his friend in possession of a large income derived from the haphazard marketing of another’s genius and labor, but the annoyance had nothing in it of jealousy at Conger’s good fortune.

Barbara had been speaking of Galton and suddenly exclaimed: “Oh, how I wish I were a man! It’s the cruelest vagary Providence is guilty of to make so many of us humans women. Cripples and blind are accidents; but females are the deliberate insult of nature. Born to a position of inferiority it is only by a ridiculous assertion of power they do not possess that

they have come to the enjoyment at last of equal rights. But of what use are equal rights without equal powers? Equal? We are inferior, and we know it."

Conger was listening — a stolen side glance assured her of that — but this extravagant vein distressed him, and he had no wish to pursue a subject on which he had more than once expressed his present convictions and explained his gradual change of sentiment.

"You're laughing at me," she continued, "but it's a real tragedy. Don't you see where it lands me? I find I simply cannot marry. I never was made to be any man's wife. And what then? Why, I haven't the ability to be an independent woman — I have no talents."

"Wait!" he insisted. "You have gifts — to say nothing of physical charms, you play and sing very well, you have a good education, decided facility in the use of French, and a fascination in manner which few possess."

"I might be a cloak model, but go on!" she prompted when he paused here, and he, taking her literally, did as she bade him.

"I have analyzed that fascination; it is unconsciously exerted; it is but the light within shining through. One cannot be like that and at the same time cold or cynical or out of tune with life. As you are gifted physically and mentally, so temperamentally are you one of the few whom nature has selected as storehouses for her sunshine. Don't look for your work and place in the world, my dear Barbara; just be content to live wherever you are, and you will make

each day the brighter for some one because you have lived it too."

He spoke in his quiet direct way. Plainly he had no intention to compliment, and yet what he said filled her so with wonder, gave her such a new purpose in living, so entirely new an estimate of herself, that she could not answer him. Was it, as he had said, enough for her to keep on being the light-hearted Barbara Wrayton with her rippling laugh and her universal sympathy? She wondered if this serious man could be right. And when she thought of his unaffected praise spoken frankly as a child might tell his thought, something within her breast fluttered so that she caught her breath and shut her eyes tight to keep back the tears that wanted to overflow in gratitude. "Perhaps I am that sort of a girl," she thought. "Oh, I will try very hard to be like that!"

To him when she could speak she said:

"I wonder if it's possible for us to be friends. The world seems to have made up its mind that a young man and a young woman"—she left the sentence unfinished and he, understanding why, and grateful to her for the restraint, only nodded and said:

"I am thankful the world had outgrown those contemptible notions before our day. Certainly we can be friends if you are willing, and I will not spoil it by trying to make love to you."

"But you will want to — will there be no temptation? Are you so sure — at the very start?"

"Friendship," he answered, smiling at her evident love of admiration, "means to one one thing, to an-

other another. To me it brings back the memory of the one little friend of my childhood — I called him Brother, and I suffer to this day when I think of his hard, unhappy life."

"I don't know what it means to me," she said, "the affection I feel for my father and mother and brother; a diluted form of the same bestowed on certain girl friends — and Galton."

"Well, then," he concluded, "you might water that out until quite sure that it is weak enough to be harmless. We could still call it friendship, an extra dash of cold water would always keep it from becoming warm." It would never do to let her suspect that he already loved her, or she would no longer wish to be friends. He must begin now the study of diplomacy, for surely friendship would be far better than outer darkness. Like other men he had taken it for granted that he could pick out the cold women; he had assumed a coexistence of frigidity with acidity. Mrs. Thornton, the dear major's wife, was his first example. She had no sex, and thanked God daily that she was just as she was. People who had sex and admitted it she looked upon as vulgar, inferior, even immoral. She wore imaginary moral pantalettes to prevent a prurient world from revelling in the wanton enjoyment of her charms, and Conger well remembered that the first time he had ever noticed a low-neck gown was at a dinner at the major's during his freshman year. Mrs. Thornton, conceding to fashion just enough of a square aperture to show a prominent collar-bone and a few inches of bluish skin south of it, kept looking down

to view herself, whether from pride or alarm, he didn't know; but each time she would hitch the squareneck a wee bit higher, and the boy wondered whether this was out of consideration for her guests or because she felt a draft. And he was called upon to readjust his ideas, to classify so human, so vitally alive a woman as Barbara with those like Mrs. Thornton who advertised it and gloried in their deficiency.

So you couldn't judge of people by their faces, their animation, the flash of their eyes, the quick response of their sympathies. All these meant nothing, and that little undercurrent of a language not spoken, transmitted in a twinkle of the eye, the slightest pressure of the hand or, subtler still, by silence when silence could be more eloquent than words. All these had been but the illusions of his own disordered imagination. Why, it actually meant, when you followed it to its lair, this horrid discovery, that life wasn't half so thrilling and full of little wonderful experiences to hug up to yourself and never tell of, as he had believed it. How disappointing! How it did take all the spice and spirits out of life and substitute in their place — rainwater! To go a step further, then, the man with a narrow head and the muzzle of a rodent with his little ratty eyes was very likely a philanthropist, philosopher and noble friend. Why not, if appearances meant nothing at all? No wonder there were unhappy marriages, and it was probably a mercy to Galton that she had decided not to marry, not to add another to the fearful list of failures.

This soliloquy was interrupted by Barbara asking,

"Well, are you going to accept my high-potency friendship, cold water and all?"

"I had thought we were friends already," he said.

"Not real friends. Real friends trust each other — even with their thoughts. That is what preserves their friendship."

"Oh, I had thought your idea was to preserve it as one keeps fish — by freezing."

He looked up and caught her eye, and something that rippled there answered him, but it laughed at the cold storage theory. She must have truant eyes; they looked honest — it was a delight to look into them — but they were running away from her theories about herself.

"Shall I, then," he asked, "tell you what were my thoughts?"

"Yes, if you trust me and believe that a man can afford to be honest with a woman."

"Then my thought was of Mrs. Thornton — I was attempting to fit you into her class — no! no!" answering a very decided frown, "not as to charm or character, but as to temperament."

"I can't help that," she admitted, with a shake of her head, "and it isn't quite fair to classify me with her, because I am capable of warm friendship, and I feel things keenly — I'm not in that lukewarm class that begin to ferment in middle life."

"So!" he said, unconsciously reverting to his former habit of speech. "The Mongolian ponies are easily taught to trot long distances in harness, but the trainers early discovered that the secret to prevent them

from breaking into a run was to determine how high each individual carried his head, then hold it checked by the rein at that position — I think you may safely do the same with me in reference to the sort of friendship you offer.”

“Do you infer that, like Mrs. Thornton, I propose to mount the box, and take the reins, while you pull the load of the friendship?”

“I am afraid my metaphor was clumsy, but I —”

“Your metaphor was not clumsy, and I see exactly what it holds out to me — but — suppose I would rather give you your head?”

“Hoping that I might take the bits in my teeth and run away, so that you would have the fun of pulling me down with the curb, or throwing me?”

“But I shouldn’t! You see, to stick to your metaphor, if you ran away, I should merely decline to run away with you; I should hop off the box and watch you.”

“Ah, and one wouldn’t be enthusiastic about running alone. This is so different, anyway, from your abhorrent idea of double harness.”

“And you see,” she added, “that there is no need of the check-rein. Friendship is so much more satisfactory than marriage. One can step out at any moment, and there’s no rumpus, because friendship depends on two agreeing — when they cease to, it isn’t — that ends it. But love seems to include a certain amount of mauling — how I hate mauling!”

“You mean —?”

— “I mean male demonstration of animal affection — and I abominate it!”

“Oh!” he said, “hence your desire for a friendship which is calm, always, and — cool — and keeps its distance.”

“I don’t want it too calm and cool — that means indifference,” she corrected him.

“Exactly,” he agreed, “the true figure comes to my mind now: Ideal friendship is typified by the lovely Venus in the Louvre — one sees her only to admire, one studies her perfections, but in the warmest outburst of enthusiasm one never forgets the little card which says: ‘Hands off!’”

“You’re not punning, are you?” she asked, forgetting for the moment that this was Conger Howe, but it ended their conversation unsatisfactorily; it was so hard to make him see that he was to maintain a respectful distance only by dint of supreme self-control.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Alas, of all the frailties flesh is heir to none is more sinister than pride which can be harsh and pitiless as hate, for wounded pride is hate's twin sister. Miss Grayley's pride was very dear to her, dearer than Miss Grayley herself knew, and Miss Grayley's pride was sorely wounded. It was not enough that she had told her friends and all the summer colony of Waquanesett that she had discovered just in time the perfidious character of Conger Howe, and had forthwith spurned him, cast him out, and with him the broken fragments of their engagement. Bess Grayley knew that her friends didn't believe her story, that Conger's silence spoke more convincingly than her own fiery denunciation, and the more she pondered that odious fact the more determined was she to punish the man.

Fortunately, the habit of observation had put her in possession of the means to pay him in full. All that was needed was to make sure of her ground before she ventured to act. Bess Grayley had thus far gone through life with her eyes open; very little escaped her, and she had prided herself on seeing things as they really were.

Something was wrong, or at least irregular, in Conger's methods of touching up and possibly even of signing pictures that were not his own work. It was all

well enough to wink at practices distinctly profitable when you were vitally interested in the profits — quite another matter when they no longer concerned you. And one might wink out of sight a circumstance undiscovered by any one else so long as no harm came of it. But, when it actually made it possible for a man to flout his infidelity in her face — that was very different, it became her moral duty to expose and punish him even though his action had been the result of immoral parentage and heathen education. The more she thought of it the plainer became her duty as a woman and a Christian.

First of all, then, she must have proof with which to confront him at the proper time. Was he actually going so far as to forge the name of Félix Étron, or did he merely retouch canvasses scraped and damaged by rough handling? She wasn't sure as to the extent of his transgression, but what she had seen in her limited opportunities to watch him had led to the suspicion that he was taking here and there one of the less characteristic of the great master's paintings, changing it slightly, and sending it out under his own name. It was the attempt, it seemed, now that he was making plenty of money as an agent, to build up a reputation for himself. If he had remained faithful to her she would have closed her eyes to it, because — well, one should be loyal to one's own, and after he had saved up enough to be comfortable, she would gently show him that heathen customs and standards were not tolerated in refined Christian society. He had, however, seen fit to cut himself off from her guidance and

protection, and now he must bear the consequences.

He had gone to New York for a day or two; it was an excellent opportunity to investigate thoroughly the canvases in his deserted studio. She could take her own time, and make sure exactly how far he had dared to go in forestalling the day when the aged master should die, leaving him in possession of pictures which he could turn into cash or fame, whichever he prized the more.

Just before five in the afternoon she set out for the shore, innocently equipped with novel, sunshade and knitting-bag. She had almost persuaded herself that her sole intention was to spend an hour alone, thinking while she worked, or reading to occupy her mind so that she need not think. She took particular pains before leaving home to see that no one was coming from either direction. She wished to be not only alone, but unobserved. But she hadn't gone a hundred yards before Barbara Wrayton overtook her. Barbara was very sorry for her; she thought it must be very hard for a girl to be dropped as Bess had been, and she must help Bess to recover.

"Coming down for a swim?" she asked.

"No, I hate cold water; and what's the use? I can't swim."

"It's only a matter of practice, Bess. Come on; I'll teach you the new crawl stroke."

"Did you learn that from Conger?" Bess asked sharply, and then could have bitten her tongue out for letting slip such a petulant admission of her feelings even to one who had been her intimate friend. Bar-

bara only turned and looked at her, but in that look Bess read pity, and she didn't want pity. She wanted people to act as though they knew that she had broken it for reasons of her own. She had never been able to play a part with Barbara because Barbara insisted on truth even when a little distortion would serve her purpose better. In such ways Bess had often noticed Barbara was not clever, was rather masculine in fact, and it amounted to a lack of tact.

"Bess," Barbara said, linking her arm in hers in the old way that she had when they were warmer friends, "we must hold each other up. I've just written Galton that it's no use; I simply couldn't go on with it. It isn't in me to love — as men expect to be loved."

"So that's the story!" Bess exclaimed, disengaging her arm. "You've had to come wheedling round to own up to that!"

"To what? You don't understand."

"Yes, I do. I understand much that has been very blind to me until now. I understand that you were not content with the devotion of a splendid fellow like Galton; you had to try your hand at seducing Conger — not that you wanted him, only to show your power over a foundling without morals or religion."

"Don't, Bess!" Barbara implored, stopping her before she could say more and worse. "You don't mean anything like that of Conger or of me."

"Oh, no," Bess blazed, quite losing her self-control. "I mean to pussy-cat my friends into a placid doze while I tiptoe about, and rob them all. I mean to keep two or three men dangling while I make up my

mind which one is going to afford me the biggest income. I mean —”

“You are talking silly nonsense, Bess, and if there was any truth in it I should probably be indignant. I rather like your courage in saying it to my face, but you know better.”

“I know worse, you mean,” Bess fairly hissed at her, “so much worse that when you find it out you’ll drop C. Howe for the serpent he is.” And with that parting shot Miss Bess Grayley was gone. Half an hour later Barbara, swimming a hundred yards off shore, and delighting in the very motion as a strong man in battle, saw a pale blue figure come out in front of Myrick’s barn high up on the cliff, and set to work prying the big doors with a long stick. Why, she wondered, should Bess be so anxious to get into Conger’s studio that she was willing to break and enter? Perhaps he had some of her letters, but surely he would never be mean enough to keep them if she asked him to return them.

The door and its padlock withstood Bess’s efforts. Barbara could see her throw down the stick and disappear round the side of the old building. Apparently she had given it up; she might indeed have come to her senses sufficiently to realize the sort of thing she was doing. The swimmer turned and went back toward the bathing beach, her easy stroke sliding her gracefully through the water. Once she turned to look back over her shoulder at Myrick’s, but the blackened, weather-beaten old barn stood lonely and deserted against its background of pines. Even the gulls soar-

ing above it took no interest in its melancholy and neglected roof; but the sunlight, Barbara knew, with wiser judgment, was entering at that very moment in search of the tall, serious artist who had worked there, silent, thoughtful, industrious, day after day, with a perseverance quite out of proportion to his success. She knew, or thought she knew, exactly how the interior of Myrick's barn looked at that moment while she swam away from it and pictured to herself its silent interior half lighted by the slanting rays that stole in through the broken roof. She could see the half-finished pictures leaning against the wall, the empty easel, the few pieces of broken furniture; and she could hear the faint voices in the pines, the weird flapping of a loose shingle, and far overhead the screech of the gulls. Barbara could imagine exactly how things looked and sounded at Myrick's, but had she been there she might have seen one who had just discovered that loose board in the back cautiously insinuating herself into the gloomy interior, first a white shod foot, then a pale blue skirt, last of all a pretty head half frightened at its own audacity.

Prowling was new to Miss Bess Grayley,—that is, actual, physical prowling. Many and many a time she had prowled in imagination, looking for sensations and finding them. She had prowled thus into studios, living-rooms, even into bedrooms, but from such prowling it was always possible to beat a hasty retreat and swear that she had never been within a thousand miles of the place. This prowling was different; if you were caught you couldn't deny it. One must be

very careful about this sort of thing. But the end was virtuous enough to justify the means. If one could expose fraud why be squeamish in getting the evidence!

Thus fortified with righteous resolution Miss Grayley stepped boldly in. That uncertain light aslant from the holes in the roof was uncanny in a great black room without a window. The loose floor creaked beneath her stealthy tread, and when she stood still it creaked again. "Never mind, there's no one to hear it!" she told herself, but still it gave her a horrid sense of being watched. Something invisible caught her across the line of her eyes. She stopped again and put up her hand to brush it away. Only a spider's web, but her heart was beating so fast that she could hear it thumping. She had to take herself in hand seriously after that, and bid herself go on like — she could think of no one in history that it was like, not Joan of Arc, of course not, nor one of the Marys.

"Let's see," she said to herself, with the strange irrelevance of one who hesitates on the verge of action and is conscious of ignoble fears, "let's see, there are so many noted Marys all the way from God's mysterious mother down to the founder of Christian Science. But why a Mary? There have been Helens, too! And Elizabeth — think what an Elizabeth managed to do, and walked off with it, none venturing to lift an eyebrow!" This was reassuring: behold another Elizabeth who also should despise matrimony as an office of supererogation. Miss Bess was not altogether sure about supererogation. It seemed to fit, but she charged herself to look it up as soon as she got

home. Then she called in her wandering thoughts to the business before her. Let the boards creak; she wasn't afraid of noises!

The outside picture in that pile that leaned against the wall under the driest part of the roof, covered with an old sail cloth, proved to be a very rough sketch of Myrick's. The shadows behind it were so deep and quiet and unfathomable that the woman lost for an instant her presence of mind and glanced uneasily over her shoulder. The next was a girl — that detestable Relief Snow. "Hm! She fairly has the nerve to smile at me, at me who might and will tell some of the things I've suspected about her lolling round here half dressed — half dressed?" That gave her a new idea, and she turned the canvases in feverish haste to find a nude that could furnish its own evidence of what Miss Grayley termed immorality, which was never immoral except when it excluded her. The nude was not there, but in its place she found one which gave her far greater satisfaction. She carried it out into one of the shafts of sunlight where she could examine it more minutely. She made pencil marks, damning proofs to call up when she deemed it wise to spring the trap so deftly laid to bring C. Howe to his knees. "Not to my knees," she soliloquized, "for, when I expose him, he will not have the earning power of a house-painter or the reputation of a day laborer." Unconsciously she was assuming that her valuation of a man was dependent on his ability to supply her with luxury. She could easily identify this picture anywhere now; even though the guilty man should try to conceal his perfidy

she had seen it when the proof was unquestionable.

A twig snapped just outside. Some one was coming. She held her breath and waited. No one could get in. She was safe if she made no sound. She felt an irresistible desire to cough, but checked it with a hand over her mouth. A sound of sniffing, sniffing came nearer and nearer along the wall of the building. It stopped opposite where she crouched. Another twig snapped, and then came the rushing, scurrying of footsteps up and down, up and down, too quick even for a child. A dog—that yellow dog! How had he tracked her? Perhaps by keeping very quiet she might fool him into the belief the old barn was empty—if only that common girl wasn't with him! Country bumpkin that put on airs and thought herself pretty because C. Howe had used her as a model!

What a tiresome, tireless dog! Would he never stop sniffing and tearing up and down?

After a time it became plain that he was alone, he was doing this bit of detective work on his own responsibility and, Heaven be praised, whatever he discovered, he could never by any chance tell. So she grew accustomed to the watchful presence outside, and finally decided to walk boldly forth, ignoring his existence.

He was waiting for her when she came out cautiously through the narrow aperture, backwards to avoid catching her skirt. He showed his teeth in a nasty, vicious snarl, and barred her way with head down and forelegs extended, ready to spring. Bess was afraid; she kicked at him violently; he came

nearer as though to dare her, and she caught him on the jaw. There was no getting away from the vicious brute, no time to crawl back into the barn. He jumped, and seized her skirt, tearing the thin fabric in a huge zigzag rent, and then he caught her by the leg and bit her savagely. She wanted to scream for help, but wanted more to get away undiscovered.

With that one bite the yellow dog was more than satisfied; his temper cooled, he was very sorry for what he had done. His drooping tail and ears told that excessive zeal in his master's service had carried him much farther than he had meant to go. He tried hard to apologize and make amends with friendly wagging tail and soft lapping tongue. The woman saw these signs; they were unmistakable, but her leg pained her; she could even feel a little trickle of blood running down into her shoe. "Get out, you nasty brute!" she cried, and the yellow dog slunk off, fearfully ashamed. It was a long time since his temper had got the better of him, and he was only defending his master's property against sneaks, prowlers, enemies of his Deity.

By good luck Miss Grayley got back home, having escaped every inquisitive eye, and reached her own room. The skirt was an irretrievable loss and necessitated a tale of briers to account for it. Exultation over the splendid success of her enterprise was dampened by the dread that those toothmarks would forever remain to mar the loveliness of a faultless calf. Her rage towards the poor yellow dog waxed the hotter now that she felt herself safe from dis-

covery. "That cur daring to attack a lady simply because she happened to be —!" But she left the sentence unfinished; some things seem far worse when we put them into words. There is a psychological side to that, and some people can feel that if you don't speak of it, give it a name, it doesn't exist.

CHAPTER XXIX

Mary M. didn't often take her washing out in the yard, not that there was much passing on their road, but — well, it wasn't the way the Snows did things. To be sure, this was not a regular wash, it wasn't Monday for that matter, but there were aprons and a couple of table cloths and a pair of pants belonging to Gene. And the day was so hot and sultry that Mary M. was stifling in the shed, so she carried the tub right out in the yard. And that is how it happened that she saw Cy Small go down towards the shore with his shot gun. Mary M. heard some one shout and she looked up "and there was Gene over acrost the rud rakin' hay an' hollerin' at Molly. That hoss, father says, is too skittish like to work on rowen; it's too much rake and turn round, and nothin' to drag like an' let you know there's somethin' back o' ye."

And it was her interest in brother Gene and Molly that accounted for her happening to see Cy Small, and that is how she explained it later to Dr. Doon.

Cy Small looked over the fence and saw her there; he noted the roundness of her arms, that her bust as she bent over the wash tub was remarkably firm and well proportioned and, in spite of the tapering smallness of her waist, he felt morally certain that she didn't wear a corset. He rebuked himself for never having been nice enough to Mary M. and resolved that, once he was through with the business in hand, he would be

particularly polite to Cap'n Thoph's oldest girl. Cy, in the almost infinite variety of his own huge family, had a daughter just Mary M's. age, but he could appreciate comeliness in the daughters of others, and was not narrow in fixing age limits.

To Mary M., Cy Small was an old man with gray hair and a poor little wornout wife who was a constant reminder of the text, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." Mary M. wasn't above thinking about younger men. Most days, she might have told you, she was too tired and her back ached too badly to think about anything, but often of a Sunday morning, when she could enjoy the luxury of lying abed till six o'clock, she would revel in the wildest imaginings. In such dreams a perfect swell, with a small mustache and a silk hat and very shiny boots, invariably came from Noo Yawk direct to Waquanesett, saw the well-rounded arms, the curly hair and other attractions of Mary M. and, vaulting the garden fence, laid all his treasures at her feet. The sequel to this weekly romance kept Mary M. patient and exalted through the Sunday morning sermon and the long prayer. And well it might, for it included a quarrel due to the jealousy of the multi-millionaire, the reconciliation, the warmth of which caused Mary M. to look very red and fan herself vigorously, the wedding and three subsequent illnesses resulting in three tiny silk hat wearers. To a girl who had such a lover, even in her mind, Cy Small cut a sorry figure as a Cupid.

Relief came out wearing once more the purple dress with the orange moons. "What's up, Rill?" the

older sister asked. "What you dressed up for this time o' day?" Relief went over close to the wash tub so that her reply needn't be heard by watchful parents, and explained: "He's comin' home to-day. Not that he cares what I have on — but it does seem — you see it's the least I can do, ain't it?"

And Mary M. nodded, poor Mary M., who had never so much as seen her hero of the silk hat! But she understood what Rill didn't say, and when she bent once more over the washtub, two big tears fell splashing into the soapsuds. Mary M. had heard enough from Rill's own lips to divine the hopelessness of her latest infatuation. She was glad Rill understood it too, but, bless you! you never could keep Rill from loving something with all her heart and soul. Poor little Rill!

But poor little Rill was on her way to the shore, singing as she went, for the joy that was in her heart. Never mind if he didn't think of her as she thought of him. He was always good and dear and thoughtful — such a boy, after all, and always that look between his eyes as if he couldn't quite make you out — but wanted to.

Cap'n Thoph, lumbering up from the fish-house in his heavy oilers, met her, frowned at the beautiful purple dress, then, remembering sundry warnings from Mrs. Snow, unbuttoned the frown and looked silly and could think of nothing to say to his youngest child. Women are more tactful. Relief, welcoming his change of expression, showed her gratitude by inquiring as to the fish in the weir.

"Get much to the ware this mornin', pa? I see the wind was settin' to the north."

"Abaout two berrels o' squid 'n a few blue fish. But them damn dogfish nigh 'most tore the lint off the paound."

"Father's different," Relief said to herself, as she kept on toward the shore. "I dunno whether he's gettin' old or what's struck him. But he doesn't glare at me with the wrath o' God in his eye, the way he useter. He's softenin' up, an' it does improve him." She wasn't conscious of any love for the old man,—didn't remember a time when she had loved him. Mother and Mary M., yes, she loved them, and Gene a little. But mother and Mary M. and Gene had never shaken God at her!

Then she fell to thinking about Him. There wasn't any name by which it seemed natural to call him. He was her artist. He was her ideal of a gentleman and a man. All the others could be classified, were classified into so many grades of prehensile males, and, according to their grades, so the more or the less did they lay hold upon and appropriate whatsoever they chanced to covet. The one and only exception was Conger Howe, the heathen, the foundling—for Relief had more than once heard the whole story. Possibly she gave him too great credit. She did not analyze; she did not use the word "prehensile." "Grabbing" meant the same, but the classification was hers. He wouldn't by any chance reach the studio for an hour, but she would wait outside on the bench where he loved to sit, and she would look out over the great bay now

buried beneath the incoming tide. She would watch the gulls flying shoreward, gorged with feeding in the weirs; she would follow the fleecy clouds breaking into long white streaks before the freshening breeze. How much he had taught her! How many things he had pointed out that she had never seen before!

In the woods that freshening breeze did not penetrate; it was very hot, and mosquitoes were thick and bold. She was glad it would be cooler in the shade of Myrick's barn. Checkerberries grew plentifully by the side of the path, the leaves still tender. She loved to chew them, and taste, long after, the fresh cool bite they left on her tongue. A little bunch of goldenrod, the very earliest of the season, adorned her belt and fought shamelessly with the orange moons, but Relief had not yet developed a sensitive eye for colors. Hers was of the aboriginal type such as delights many of the moderns — a distinct reversion to the primitive. Possibly they are right, and there is no such thing as discord in colors. If there is, Relief Snow hadn't suspected it, and disagreement was farthest from her thoughts when she was startled by a shot. The sound came from the direction of Myrick's. It might have been just off shore, but who would be shooting in mid-summer at the shore? "The law's on, and they wouldn't darst at this time o' year," Rill told herself as another shot rang out. Then she began to run. She didn't know why she ran, it was an instinctive feeling that something must be wrong.

She came out breathless on the bluff by the old barn. No one was there. Not a sound broke the stillness of

the summer day. Then, far down below her, a woman's voice cried: "This way! This way!" And, peering over the edge, she saw a man and a woman running up the beach, much hampered in their progress by the soft sand. The man carried a gun, and the woman was cutting across ahead of him to reach the gully beyond the bluff where they could not be seen.

Something lay on the beach directly below Myrick's, and writhed, struggling to get up. A horrid fear seized Relief that she knew what it was, that writhing object not much darker or yellower than the sand on which it lay, and she flew down the winding path, heedless now of the couple fleeing up the beach, heedless of the precious purple gown. Was it what she feared? "Oh, God!" she prayed as she ran. "Don't let it be that! Don't let it be that!"

CHAPTER XXX

When Bess Grayley, in the privacy of her own bedroom, had removed the wrecked blue gown, had very gingerly peeled off the blood-stained white stocking and bathed her wound, a smart remained more poignant than the bite itself, more bitter than the dread of infection. That common yellow dog had attacked her, a lady, and he still lived. Alcohol and a strip of linen could go far as a substitute for the cauterizing that she dared not ask for. But what, she pondered, could heal the deeper wound? Retribution!

Cy Small, she believed, once owned the cur; and Cy would do anything for a dollar. Hadn't the doctor once said that Cy Small would do almost anything for fifty cents—anything but work! Cy was the man to get.

It was a long walk up to his house, long, hot, and dusty. But she started early and had her reward in finding Cy in his dooryard. His coat was off, also his collar, apparently in readiness for work. At present his back alone was visible. He stood on one foot, the other elevated to the first bar of the pigsty fence, and watched intently two aged sows who were asleep in the mud. When Cy, Jr., beholding a lady caller, hailed him with, "Father! I say, father!" he replied without turning round: "Shut up, son; I'm busy now!"

So the lady herself approached and plucked him by his dirty shirt-sleeve. Then he turned, took out his corn-cob pipe, spit once, and said: "How d'ye do? You wanta see the missis, I s'pose." Having removed his pipe he didn't deem it necessary to bother about his hat, and the lady visitor almost lifted it off his head with surprise when she said, "I've come to see you, Mr. Small — on a matter of business."

Mr. Small, who couldn't remember any similar experience in his entire life, was distinctly flattered. "Will you step inside?" he asked. It seemed more fitting to the transaction of business than leaning up against the pigsty. The children, curious to know who and what and why, had come within hearing distance, so the lady thought well of the suggestion, and they went in, where children might not overhear and draw their own conclusions in the irritating way of children.

Mrs. Small was in the kitchen as they went through and looked up from the sink where she was peeling potatoes. She was a large slatternly woman with watery eyes and a secret that she took no pains to conceal. "Good heavens!" thought the lady visitor, "isn't there even an age limit in the Small family?" And then she and Cy Small were in the parlor with the door shut, and she was seated on the haircloth-covered sofa that hadn't been dusted for months until she sat down. The room was damp and close, and smelt of decaying wood. The dirty, faded wallpaper was streaked with the records of a bad leak under one window, and the Rogers group on the white marble-topped table no longer was true to its title, "The Eve-

ning Hour," for the kneeling child had lost her head, and it lay in the mother's lap along with a collection of burnt matches and an abortive lottery ticket.

The business was soon settled, as soon as the dollar fee was mentioned. Cy got his shotgun, which wasn't where he thought it was, but finally was discovered in the woodshed where he had left it, and they set out, Cy following at a distance so as not to excite suspicion. After all, that dog had been condemned once, and his record at that time was very bad. It was a public service to get such a menace out of the way. The lady knew the dog's habits, had better reason to know than she confided to Cy Small, and knew that in his master's absence he spent most of his time in the neighborhood of Myrick's.

And there they found him lying curled up in the sun by the big doors, now padlocked. He rose when they came near and, when they turned aside to avoid him, lay down again. They didn't concern him so long as they didn't trespass on sacred ground. He didn't sleep, however, for he knew them both, and neither pleased him.

"Not here," the lady had said. "This is too conspicuous. You must get him down on the beach!" So they found a rough path down, a quarter of a mile to the eastward, and came back till they were opposite Myrick's barn. From down below there was no sign of the yellow dog. Cy whistled, and he stood up, came to the edge, and looked down at them. Again Cy whistled, and the dog wagged his tail, which was his way of saying, "All right, what's up?" He had

no intention of going down there to join them. Then they threw stones at him, those thrown by the lady landing a quarter way up the bluff; but those thrown by Cy Small came near enough, so the yellow dog thought, to indicate hostility. He barked a protest, and was answered with hisses. Once more he barked a warning that ended in a deep growl. A shower of stones and hisses was the answer from below. He started towards them down the steep bank where no man could keep his footing. Before he reached them a stone had hit him, and the woman, the woman he had never liked, was hissing at him, daring him to come on. He wasn't afraid of her. He saw Cy Small raise his gun to his shoulder; he had seen Cy do that a good many times. It meant a loud noise and a dead bird, but where was the bird? The shot rattled round him. Something stung him in the shoulder. He stopped short, and, with ears pricked, tried to understand what Cy was about. He came down on to the beach quite near them, walking slowly, uncertain. Cy raised the gun again, and fired point blank. Without a sound the dog dropped, and lay panting in agony. A great gaping wound in his side poured forth its red toll upon the sand almost at the lady's feet, and once he turned his head to look at it, for even then he could not understand that the man he once called master had done this thing to him.

Far down the beach a tiny speck moved. It was hurrying towards them. And the woman saw it, and the man and the woman ran, leaving the yellow dog to die alone there on the beach in front of Myrick's.

CHAPTER XXXI

Dr. Doon numbered among his patients one family that rivalled the Smalls in the race for the Queen's Bounty. They were what the natives call "Portugees," and they lived in a tiny shack at the water's edge, near the eastern boundary of the town. Whether by accident or from a desire to be eccentric, the young man whose arrival was to add yet another star to the galaxy of this Portugee family, refused to enter the world according to what is considered good form, and uttered his protest, much to Dr. Doon's disgust, by protruding his feet. So the good doctor whose fee for obstetrical service was twenty-five dollars, and who never got more than five from the father of so many "Portugees," sent back his gig and the fleabitten gray in charge of the eldest son, and spent the night officiating in the triple capacity of family physician, nurse and anaesthetist. The result was another lusty, squalling "Portugee," a tired, dozing mother in a stuffy little room; a very unconcerned father who grunted and went off to work as though he knew nothing whatever about it — and a rotund but jaded doctor who left during the forenoon to walk home along the beach where he could get a breath of fresh air.

And as Dr. Doon, holding his hat in his hand that he might feel the air on his bald head, came round

Quagit Point, walking slowly, meditating on life and what people do with it — he saw a white puff of smoke, and then he heard the report of a gun. He spied two figures on the beach, and then came another puff of smoke and another report. The two figures started at a run, and soon were lost to sight; another, apparently a woman, came hurrying down the path from Myrick's. He could see now her skirts fluttering as she ran, and, forgetful of his own sober advice to fat people never to hurry, the doctor, fearing there was need of his skill, began to run also, and, after a few yards, to walk again and breathe very hard and fast. He took off his coat and carried it over his arm. He had by now quite forgotten his sleepless night.

Relief, on her knees, was bending over something that she completely hid, but her sobs forewarned the good man that he had come upon a tragedy.

"Now, let me see, dear, just how bad it is. There, there! That's a good little girl," as he gently put her aside to examine the wound, and adjusted his spectacles for a careful scrutiny. The dog feebly tried to raise his stubby tail in thanks, and with his mournful eyes upon the doctor's lay still and never winced during the painful examination.

Relief sobbed incessantly, and the doctor worked once more to save a life. Neither knew how or when he came, but suddenly Conger Howe was with them, and he had fallen flat beside the yellow dog, encircling him tenderly in both his arms, burying his face in the dog's face. And the yellow dog forgot his awful hurt, and licked his master's cheek.

Dr. Doon, glancing back from these two to the girl, saw that blood was dripping from the bunch of goldenrod she wore, and that it stained the orange moons.

No word was spoken. One long, agonizing look that took in the cruel injury, the dark clotted blood, the dear, patient eyes, so pleased to find him there, and Conger, lost to all else on earth, was living only for the yellow dog and the few short minutes they still might have together. If he heard the girl's sobs he heeded them no more than the raucous cry of the crows that came to look from a safe distance and whet their craven appetites in the shadow of death.

He could feel the pulse grow weaker. The tongue tried for one last time to carry its message of love and devotion. The eyes, blurred and dim, sought for one final smile from the god of their worship, failed, closed on the world; and, with a sigh — the yellow dog was dead.

The man still lay there with the warm body in his arms; the girl still sobbed, holding her face in her two hands. The doctor rose, picked up his coat and hat, and silently resumed his journey up the beach.

Two hours later Rill and Conger Howe stood by a little grave, fresh filled and covered with pine boughs, close by the old bench in front of Myrick's barn. Conger straightened up and, with his hands clasped behind him, gazed at the far-off sky line. The girl knelt and laid her withered bunch of goldenrod on the grave; then softly turned to walk away and leave the lonely watcher with his grief.

"I must hear about it," he said, gently. "Much as I hate to know the horrible details, you must tell me how and why it happened." And so she told him all she knew, which wasn't much after all, and neither tried to keep back the tears that overflowed afresh at thought of it.

"I think it was that — Miss Grayley that done it," Relief ended her story, and he only nodded and said, "I am afraid that is so." Surely, the girl thought, that wasn't the end of it! And she asked:

"Ain't you goin' to do somethin'— to get even?"

"Would anything bring back the life that is lost?"

That was all. The great doors were unlocked and swung open, the easel was placed where the light was best, and C. Howe went to work as though no interruption had marred his day — no dearly loved friend had left him never to return.

And, as in those old days, when he was a boy in China, so now the man felt no resentment, only the burning sorrow that another chapter in his life had come to untimely end. The Empress Dowager! He still shuddered at the name. The suspicion suggested itself that women were more cruel than men. Then the image of Ya-tzu came to correct that error,— Ya-tzu, so much kinder than the Rat! One must not grow bitter, for life holds more sunshine than sorrow. Nothing, no loss, no grief, no disappointment, should blind his eyes to that. So his thoughts ran as he worked, but Relief, who watched him, saw that the lines between his eyes were deeper, that his lips were shut together very tight, and Relief knew that not

without a mighty struggle was the man triumphing over his hour of blackness.

Dr. Doon, who had from the first made up his mind to find out by whom and why the cowardly deed was done, called over the fence to Mary M. as she was carrying in an armful of wood for the kitchen fire. And Mary M. came out to the gate, still cherishing her kindlings. The doctor was in his gig and wanted to know whether a man and a woman had been by their house with a gun. Mary M. felt quite important to be able to state how she happened to look up and see Cy Small.

"But there wa'n't no lady along o' him then. Leastways I didn't see none."

"Thanks!" Dr. Doon said, and, as he turned the fleabitten gray in the narrow grass-grown road, he added:

"I'll soon get the rest of it out of him."

"Well, I think you'd orter tell me what you find out, bein's I told you who done it."

"Who did what?" he asked. "Has Rill got home?"

"No, she ain't. But I think you might tell me what — what the man — and the gun — and Rill done. I don't hev no chance, tied up here doin' house-work, to see things, no excitin' times — only prayer-meetin' an' a very few funerals."

"All right, Mary M., I'll come back and tell you," and with that the fleabitten gray was off again.

For the doctor who spent his life in setting people right, broken people who needed mending, sick people

who needed guiding, silly people who needed correcting, stricken people who needed comforting, saw in this another case, and went to treat it with all the zeal and all the skill at his command. And he needed it all to penetrate the hide of Cy Small, who only puffed out his cheeks when told that it was the artist who had been helping him to keep his family during the past two winters, and whined his favorite dirge about the rich growing richer and the poor poorer. "Ain't I even got a right to earn an honest penny?" he wailed.

"You damn fool," the doctor retorted, "you haven't the decency of a skunk, you and your honest penny; don't you know that for years the rich have been growing poorer and the poor richer; that it has been a blessing to mankind, and that now the only danger is it may go too far in the opposite direction? Damn you!" And the irate doctor shook his fist in Cy's face. What a sense of decency or a suspicion of gratitude failed to arouse in the craven breast of Mr. Small was finally awakened when Dr. Doon pictured the athletic C. Howe itching to close his fingers upon the throat of the man who killed his dog.

"Did you ever see him pitch hay?" the doctor added. "Have you seen him run for miles on the road like a racehorse, or tear through the water like a motor boat? There isn't a man in these parts could live five minutes in a fight with him! And I can tell you one thing, you poisoned pimple! you needn't send for me to patch up your wounds, I'd throw salt in them—if there's enough of you left to recognize when he gets through with you."

With that fusillade the doctor, very red in the face, left him, left a very different man from the blusterer he had found, a man whose face and neck were wet with a cold sweat, a man who went round locking doors and windows, who crawled upstairs to his bed, telling Mrs. Small that the rheumatiz had struck to his heart, and never left his bed for ten days, trembling all over every time the sound of wagon or motor or hurrying footsteps could be heard. Every night he would start up terrified by some fearful dream in which the tall dark artist was stalking him, ready to pounce, and Mrs. Small, who knew nothing of her husband's doings save that he was the father of all but one of the little Smalls, would comfort him as she would a child sick with fever. From his unwilling lips the good doctor had wrung the name of the woman, and once Miss Grayley's name had come out Cy threw upon her the whole burden of his guilt, vowing that he had never known an unkind or evil thought, and beseeching the doctor to put the blame where it belonged. Poor Cy Small was not the first man to cry that the woman had tempted him.

Diagnosis is two-thirds of a doctor's job, and Dr. Doon was a successful practitioner. He didn't carry his accusation to Miss Grayley, suspecting the cause and motive of her misdeed. Instead he went straight to Conger, gave him all his facts, and left the matter there; he didn't even ask him what he proposed to do about it. Very likely he didn't need to ask, for a tacit intimacy had grown up between these two men, and its basis was mutual understanding and admiration.

Not forgetting his promise to Mary M., he went back to Cap'n Thoph's to gratify her curiosity. What she had said about her lack of excitement had struck him as pathetically true, and he would not have blamed Mary M. if, like some other fillies, she had not only kicked but jumped the fence.

Meantime Conger himself was wrong in imagining that he knew the reason why Cy Small had been hired to take the life of the yellow dog. Only Miss Grayley knew that this event was merely to square matters between herself and the dog, a more subtle and lasting punishment being reserved for the master.

Sometimes, as we grow up — and they are happiest who keep on growing up as long as they live — we can look back to triumphs or defeats well borne, to gains or losses, that served us as rungs in the ladder. And to these days, following his break with Bess, C. Howe looked back in after years as to the most important mile-stone of his life, though at the time he was merely conscious of the purpose to live his life according to his own standards. That Bess Grayley was by no means through with him; that she had laid so clever a trap that he should henceforth be an outcast without friends or money, he could not know. Only Bess knew that, and the knowledge of it gave to her eyes a peculiar greenish glitter, to her imagination the joy of those who conquer, and to her heart the comfort of complete revenge. Barbara, meeting her at a tennis party, saw it and wondered, saw that she hit the ball too hard, sending it out of bounds, and Barbara translated it into terms of wounded pride and hate, and

she was sorry for Conger who, like herself, had recoiled on the brink of matrimony. But how different his treatment from the fine magnanimity of Galton Gragg whose letter had brought her to tears,—no word of reproach or bitterness, only regret for his loss and the hope that she might yet find elsewhere so great a love as could kindle her own. “Dear Galton!” she had exclaimed when she read it. “How I wish I knew how to love you as you deserve!”

CHAPTER XXXII

So many things to be understood must be looked at relatively: a trifle is no longer a trifle if it gets in your eye. The great Darwin was much troubled because he couldn't account for the tuft of hair on the breast of the wild turkey cock, not because hair so located inscrutably engenders pride, but because he was studying the origin of species.

C. Howe was troubled; there were many serious things to trouble him. It seemed that his Oriental ethics had played him false. There was no telling where the spite of Bess Grayley might lead her; and it was not unlikely that Galton might misinterpret his influence with Barbara.

But none of these things troubled him at all; his anxiety was lest he should betray to Barbara the love which overwhelmed him, but which, as he now fully understood, to her would be painful, putting an end to all friendship between them.

He had written Galton at length concerning the fiasco with Bess, assuming all the blame. In reply had come a characteristic letter from Galton explaining his own unhappy trial, and at the end this frank avowal:

"Nothing would please me more, if she will not have me, than that you should marry her. She thinks

you are a very unusual man — don't blush! I didn't say it! Curiously enough, I'd like to see her happy."

Conger carried the letter in his pocket, and read it over many times each day, and every time, as he folded it again, would come before him the picture of Barbara explaining to him how she was incapable of love.

She was at her gate, next time they met, and she stopped him with a friendly hail. Then she spoke of the dog:

"I am so sorry. He was such a dear!"

"Yes," Conger said, looking away toward the shore, "I loved him — and he loved me — that means understanding."

"And now?" Barbara said, leading him to what sort of answer? She didn't know, only that it was dangerous — but her sympathy was genuine.

"Now?" he repeated. "I have no longer my friend, my companion. I think to go back to Paris."

"And you will see my beloved Félix Étron. And some fine day I too shall come to Paris, and you will introduce me to him."

"So!" Conger said, and was thoughtful until she drew him out once more.

"But have you friends there — I mean besides the dear old man, friends whom you — love?"

"It is such a difficult word, love. The Greeks, you remember, had two words for it. One for your kind, another for — for the other kind."

"And which kind have you in Paris, that you think of getting back to?"

"Ah! That, unfortunately, is your kind."

"Unfortunately?" she asked. "Is the calm so much less fortunate than the storm?"

"If there is moving to be done, yes!"

"And you are anxious to move something—in Paris?"

"Wherever I am," he answered. "The fleecy white cloud is pretty, but one admires the black cloud that holds the possibilities of the tempest."

"I wonder," Barbara said, and paused. "The pattering of rain on the roof; the coming and going of the tide; the wind in the trees, all those are moving—but not storm—not violent, just strong and steady. Why aren't they better?"

"I, too, love the sunshine and the calm," Conger said, seriously. "But sometimes—do you never feel so deeply, so strongly, that no calm is possible then—only conflict, struggle, the fury of the storm, or the passion you despise?"

"I don't know," she whispered, for what he had said and his evident earnestness had almost carried her away from her boasted calm. "I have always felt, rather than believed, that letting oneself go was primitive, weak, a lack of control and proper restraint. And why isn't it?"

"What is gained by it?" he answered. "In New England it has always been held that, if you like it, it's wrong. You have never seen in Peking the song-birds that are tied by the leg: they fly a few feet; then their tether holds them. Little by little captivity clips the wings of their song. I used to feel that I was one of them, that it was life. My mandarin taught me

that it was only despoiling life. To be natural, to let yourself go, to live fully, freely, joyously — this was to get the best and to give the best. But you of New England, it would seem, prefer the straight and narrow way that leadeth to that sexless Elysium dreaded by every honest soul that believes in it."

"I don't subscribe to Puritanism. Mine is only rudimentary," she protested. "As a principle I believe in your idea of living fully, freely, joyously, but in practice — I never fly far without feeling the tether. About going back to Paris — you are not going at once, are you?"

"I had set no time. But why? Some commission that I could execute there — in the shops?"

"No — nothing so cold and calculating. I just didn't want to lose you so soon. There! Is that living freely — to come out flatly with one's thoughts?"

"It is a good beginning," he said, "and it gives me a warm feeling when I needed friendship. I thank you for wishing me to know it."

She little knew that he left her then abruptly because he would not trust himself to go on. Banter or general discussion of principles was firm ground; when she was gentle and human about him he felt there was no solid footing under his feet, and fled rather than fall. For he knew that there lay but one choice before him — a cool, calm friendship or outer darkness, and he chose the friendship, hard as it was for him to keep to its terms.

Every time they met, and it was daily, he was conscious of holding himself in check, and, because it was

not safe to let their talk become too personal, he spoke oftener than he realized of Paris, confided much to her of his life while there, the friends, men and women, and the unconventional ways of artist folk. He showed her how the protection of the women in this life lay in its very naturalness, the natural inclination of the woman to be helpful and inspire the best, the natural readiness of the man to protect.

He was looking back to things that had been, frankly stating facts and ascribing motives. She, looking forward to his return to that life, saw in it a keen personal interest in one of the women whom he classed as the best and fairest of them all. He was far too ingenuous to exaggerate the girl's attractiveness in order to arouse his hearer's jealousy. It was what a woman would have done, but Barbara knew that he was altogether too direct for that, and consequently she was the more disposed to see in it the chief cause of his desire to leave America.

Young as she was, Barbara had seen enough of life to learn that we react differently to different persons; that one seems to call upon us to be entertaining, another expects us to be wise, and one calls forth all that is best in us.

So it was no surprise to find that her friendship with Conger seemed totally different from that with Galton, but what did upset her more and more was the discovery that each interview left her more dissatisfied with her own part in it, and she asked herself why it was that, while Conger was just what she had asked him to be, it didn't satisfy her. He was going away

soon, in a few weeks, back to Paris. That pleased her still less. She was unwilling to be more than a friend to him, but she demanded of him that he be dissatisfied with mere friendship, claiming the love which she could not give him. She was really afraid that his calm acceptance of her restrictions indicated not self-control but lack of interest, and, to gratify her vanity, she simply couldn't resist the temptation to put him to the test.

One day, after a hard set of tennis — he had beaten her three straight sets, but she had made him work — they were on the way to the beach with a dozen others, and they lagged behind. It seemed strange to Barbara that she had always so many things to say to Conger. As soon as she had left him, each day, she was sure to think of something very important that she had forgotten to ask him about, and only the night before she had taken herself to task for it as she sat before her mirror, braiding her hair in two thick braids for the night. It was a very pleasing picture that she faced, but she paid no heed to it; perhaps long familiarity had something to do with that. But she challenged the girl confronting her in the glass.

"Are you flirting with that man, playing fast and loose, when he is the very sort of friend you asked him to be?"

The girl in the mirror looked embarrassed. She didn't relish the insinuation; her broken engagement was too fresh in her mind, and she hated triflers even worse than the self-indulgent who talked of temperament.

"But what am I doing?" she went on, and the girl in the glass looked her straight in the eyes and answered:

"You are just being natural. You like each other, and why not? Pooh! Why not? He's a man grown, and will look out for himself. You can depend on that — the man looks out for himself, every time!"

Barbara felt grateful to the girl in the glass for giving her so sane a view of it, and went to bed happy.

Then something woke her up as the hall clock was chiming the half hour, and she lay awake because in the dark it always seems vitally important to know what hour it is. And then the hall clock, after a long Westminster chime that had the right tones in the wrong order, struck four. "I can sleep three more hours," she told herself, but she was wrong. Her eyes were very wide open, and she was blaming herself for ever having listened to such blithering nonsense as that about Conger looking out for himself. That was a falsehood, to begin with. Hadn't she expressly stated the terms on which they could be friends? How flat that had been of her — as much as to say that he was in danger of falling in love with her! That wasn't the danger, at all: it was that she would make him appear in a false light before his friends. They would naturally infer that he was in love with her and that she was holding him at a distance. It was her duty to release him now that she could see.

"No, I'm not even honest with myself," she concluded. "I know, any woman would know, that he

loves me, and my problem is whether I have any right to allow it."

She was the first one down to breakfast, an unusual distinction, and could not eat, which was also unusual. And now at last she had Conger to herself, and could talk it over with him — if she dared. She couldn't tell him how she had been puzzling over him for hours until, at the very last, she had come out honestly and admitted to herself what she had known to be the truth, but would not acknowledge because she didn't want it to be so.

"I lay awake this morning a long time thinking," she began.

"About — ?" He only uttered the one word, but she saw that he knew what was coming.

"About us. I know it cannot be a satisfactory sort of agreement for you; it is liable to misinterpretation by all these others. So —" here came a long pause, and finally she went on: "I am glad you have decided to get back to Paris. It will be better for both of us. I am not like other people. Something wrong with me."

"So!" That was all he said, and, as he swung along beside her with his peculiar easy, sliding gait, his mind was actively picturing the lad who trotted behind the 'rickshaw on that morning when he had been forced to say good-by to Ya-tzu and take his place among the half-starved boys in the rug factory. Life — what was life at best but what the day brought! And one must take it as it came. If he had cherished a wee germ of hope that she might change, he had

never allowed it to take root as a definite possibility. Already he was setting his house in order for the life that should shut her out completely, but should go on nevertheless with purpose and determination to make every day count. There was not now to be, there never had been, any turning aside to lie prone and brood over loss and disappointment. Only a tighter closing of the jaws, a deepening of the lines between his eyes, and the steady keeping at the things that make up life.

Barbara, walking by his side, stole now and then a glance at the strange, silent figure, and recalled how at times he had thrown wide the windows of his soul that she might see in. No closest union could do more than that. "But we have to live our lives alone," she thought. "No matter how hard we try to let some one else in, when the business of living is on, the shutters are down, and we live as we die — alone."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Twenty centuries ago Pilate asked the question: "What is truth?" and the narrative fails to record an answer. Is it fidelity to facts, or loyalty to superstition? Twenty centuries after Pilate's famous question the civilized world is divided over the answer.

Can we, then, cavil if Bess Grayley heard the clear call of duty, in the cause of truth, to expose Conger Howe and his heathen standard of ethics? It was not from any petty motive such as spite; it was, in fact, against her very nature, but truth is mighty, and it was for Bess Grayley to give the answer for which Pilate has waited so long.

She need not, to be sure, have furnished it with a dramatic setting, such as staged the question in the beginning, but it was in Bess's nature to do things thoroughly and well, so she did much planning and thinking and a little supplementary prowling. The result was that she acquainted herself thoroughly with Conger's habits of work. She knew when to find him at his studio and how much time he allowed to get back to his meals. Then she whispered to one and another about a startling disclosure which would soon cause so violent a disturbance that thousands who never heard of Waquanesett would be reading about it and talking of it and looking it up on their maps. Natur-

ally some of this prophecy filtered through to Conger and might have served as a warning to him, but, if he understood its significance, he made no change in his habits.

Conger Howe was sick at heart, and rumors, even though heavy with portent, concerned him very little. He was going away to break from Barbara. It was the only way. She saw it. She had told him that it was the only way, because for some inexplicable reason, she did understand his feeling, did even appreciate a state of mind or emotion of which she herself was incapable. He had no slightest fear that this new sorrow and disappointment would ruin his life or wreck his career. He knew that he was going to grit his teeth and clench his fists and go into life harder than ever, that he was not about to mope and brood over the past, but to postpone thinking about it until time had graciously healed the smart, and removed it far enough from him so that it should not fill his whole horizon, and he could see it clearly. This was what he had done from childhood. Then the bitter things had come so often, the danger of worse to come was so persistent, that common prudence had dictated a policy of deferred judgment. By the time he was ready to review one grievance another was on top of him, and, hard as the lesson was, it had taught him the futility of worry. But the consciousness of so great a break in his life was a dark cloud over him, compared with which all other disappointments seemed but trifles.

He saw Barbara every day, and they were the best

of friends. The approaching separation must have been in her mind to give that new reluctance to the gaze with which she left him, a very different gaze from the greeting of friends long separated, but like the last, long, tenacious look of those who part when one sails away on the proud ship, and one stands on the wharf and waves a farewell as the distance between them widens. Such a sadness parents feel when children leave home, and schoolmates sometimes on their day of graduation. It was not even an argument for marrying, and, if Conger had only been like her, Barbara saw there would be no reason why they could not always have each other. What a pity men were so different! She very gladly consented to sit for a portrait. "I am not a portrait painter," he had told her, "but if I may take you for my model I will try to make it a portrait." She knew too well how much he wanted it, to ask any questions.

An afternoon in late August, Barbara's fourth sitting, she occupied the old bench, and leaned against the weather-stained boards of Myrick's barn that faced the north. Salt and long exposure had left them silver grey as the rails of an old cedar fence, a soft background for the picture, soft as the light itself. Something of the hazy atmosphere reappeared on the canvas at which the man worked steadily, silently, his back to the water, to the long stretch of beach, to the distant figures, twenty of them, men and women, coming slowly along the shore towards Myrick's. Barbara had sat there for two hours thus, her hands loosely clasped in her lap, and he had worked in silence.

At length: "May I come and have a look at it?" she asked, and, as though she had waked him from a sleep, he started at the sound of her voice, then smiled and answered:

"How thoughtless of me—I had forgotten—everything!"

"How lovely!" sprang involuntarily to her lips when she saw it, for there faced her one whose beauty seemed to be the revelation of a soul. It wasn't she, Barbara Wrayton, looking out from that picture. "What do you try to paint," she asked, "the ideal, with your model suggesting only the husk?"

He shook his head. "It is hard to say what one tries to paint; I should say it was to paint what one sees. If one sees outline and color and nothing more, one paints the picture card. But, if one sees, in the subject character, deeply graven things, good or bad, one paints them as one sees them, superficiality, depth, meanness, nobility, weakness or strength: the painter may not be a prophet or a seer but he portrays what his eyes tell him is there."

"Oh, Conger! How your eyes have deceived you about me!" Her exclamation was so genuine, a protest he didn't for an instant mistake it for a woman's thirst for admiration.

The longer she studied the painting the more deeply was she moved by the spirit of that woman sitting there all unconscious of herself. What problem was being thought out behind those unfathomable eyes looking not at you, but through and beyond you? In that pure face you saw the ideal woman: there was neither guile

nor self-absorption, but strength was combined with sweetness; and with singular purity an unmistakable womanliness that was neither cold nor indifferent. "It is not I, Conger. But oh, how I wish it were."

"It is so I see you," he said, looking from the canvas to the model.

"Then it is so you idealize your friends —"

He interrupted her here. "Of what were you thinking as you sat so calmly here these past two hours? Was it of yourself?"

"I was wondering about you, Conger, about what the future held for you. And I was regretting that one cannot have friendships that endure without changing. I believe I was wishing I might change the world over. And then, just at the very end, I began on the foundation of an air castle, and so I jumped from that to being curious as to how much of my real mood you had guessed."

"It is not guessing," he answered, still studying the portrait by aid of its model, "it is seeing."

A new thought possessed her. She had not before looked at his work as a painting. Now she exclaimed: "I had no idea you could paint anything so — so satisfactory, so convincing. It isn't I any more than it is Relief Snow, so I may praise it. If it were a picture of some one else I should long to ask her a question."

"Then I am satisfied with the likeness," he said, "for I too should like to ask her — many questions. It is that which makes people interesting, is it not? — that quality which invites questioning. It presupposes the existence of things worth finding out, of answers

that might be given. You never long to question the stupid, the silly, the shallow, though they may be beautiful to look at."

His praise seemed so impersonal, directed to the girl of the picture, that she was not embarrassed by it. Only its reflection, that about it which did pertain to her, was delightfully warming and invigorating. It left a desire and a purpose to try to live up to that other girl who existed in his imagination.

"When did you begin this sort of thing?" she asked,— "expressing your thoughts without words?"

"It is older than writing. Perhaps it was China that gave it to me before ever I had been taught to read or write. I shall never forget my first effort. It was the Altar of Heaven which one could see from a point near our house. I had a big sheet of paper and a bit of charcoal. Brother — that was my little friend, the donkey — lay at my feet, flat on his side as though he were dead. And he was, very nearly, from cruel overwork. I could see where the circular terraces of white marble rose one on another until in the centre of the uppermost circle was the stone where once a year the Emperor used to kneel, surrounded first by the circles of the terraces and finally by the circle of the horizon. I knew that then whole animals were sacrificed to all the gods of all that vast circle of the heavens. And I tried to put on the paper my boyish wonder and awe at the thought of beauty combining here with majesty and the mystery of gods — other emperors whom one might not behold even once in a year. It was a very weird production, but I think I

got the outlines of the picture as I saw it. As for my spiritual interpretation — !”

“And what became of it? Did you keep it?”

The color came flooding to his face, and he was back there again. “I had hardly finished drawing. I was holding it up to compare with the real when the owner of the donkey came looking for him. And with him was the Rat, who was looking for me. One kicked the donkey — his feet were bare, but he kicked him in the head, and the other seized me and beat me with a stick till he was tired. You see we had been hiding to escape work.”

“Poor little tired fellows!” Barbara exclaimed. “You and your patient little friend! And so the picture —”

“The picture was trodden into the dust, but not the spirit to portray. After that I drew many pictures for Ya-tzu, and she kept them all carefully hidden from the Rat. Later, when life had opened to me and I was travelling with my mandarin, he got me a chance in Nanking to do some color work on a wall surrounding a military mandarin’s garden. You see, the civil mandarins were known by their floral decorations, often on the high plastered walls about their gardens. But military mandarins used animal decorations.”

“A subtle appropriateness I shouldn’t have suspected in Chinamen,” Barbara interjected.

He only nodded and went on. “I had seen many camels and horses, the Manchu bear, and numerous small creatures. I fairly revelled in that work; it was restoration, but much of it quite obliterated, and it re-

quired only the minimum of talent, mixed with imagination. Some day I should love to go back and have a look at it, particularly a wonderful dragon done in green and blue, his face as good a portrait of the Rat as I could draw from bitter memory."

"You speak of life opening to you through the blind mandarin," Barbara smiled. "Was it then you got the idea that the object of life was power?"

"I think that was the beginning, but — I know better now, Barbara; the legitimate aim and object in life is —"

"Wait!" she whispered, and pointed down the path. "If they hear voices it may tempt them to come up and interrupt us. I've been watching them as they came along the beach, the regular crowd, and Bess among them."

They were coming up, all talking at once, and, in the babel of voices, the only distinguishable utterance was: "What sort of a game is this, Bess?"

Conger turned the canvas before him that it need not be profaned by idle curiosity. This seemed a deliberate attempt to annoy him; he had never encouraged visitors.

Arrived on the little space before the old barn, they seemed indeed a crowd. It was Bess Grayley's party, and she took the lead. Singling out Barbara she addressed herself to her.

"We have come up here to see a certain picture that is, or was, in that pile just inside the door. It is a picture of Relief Snow, not a good likeness, and not a

picture any one of good taste would care to own. But we want to see it."

C. Howe came forward, strangely troubled, for he had seen Galton's mother in the group, and he surmised that she had been invited to see him humiliated. But how? What could Bess know to cause him shame?

"If you know what picture you wish to exhibit you are at liberty to find it," he said, coming close to where Bess Grayley stood. Only Barbara caught the defiant look, the steely glitter in her eyes, with which she answered the invitation. Then she advanced boldly, and began examining the pile of pictures. "Some one has tampered with them," she declared, breathless in her anger. Next moment she had found it, and came out holding it in her hand. No one broke the tense stillness. They had been invited to witness what Miss Grayley had called "the truth revealed." The space was small for so many; some were standing on the little grave of the yellow dog. Mrs. Gragg, suspecting tragedy in wait for the boy she had loved next to her own, was trying to wink out of sight the tears that would come. Dr. Doon, with his back to the others, held his straw hat in both hands and revolved it hurriedly, as though expecting to come to the end of the brim.

"You recognize this picture?" There was a harshness in Bess's tone that sounded cruel. Barbara was looking squarely into her eyes. That might have accounted for it.

"Relief Snow," a dozen voices proclaimed.

"Then look carefully at the forgery," holding it higher so that all could see the signature: "Félix Étron!"

Barbara's face, a moment before unusually red, was suddenly become deathly pale. Mrs. Gragg trembled violently and felt that she was going to fall, and Dr. Doon was heard to mutter shocking profanity. All eyes turned from the picture to the painter.

They in the East who take the place of beasts of burden learn, like them, to stand relaxed, but still as death. So C. Howe, once "Hsiao," stood, his gaze never straying from the face of his accuser, not a muscle betraying the depth of his emotion. A very young lady, conspicuous in the front row by reason of a long expanse of pink clad legs, coughed violently. Some one behind her asked some one else, "What do you think of that?" The spell was broken. Headed by the doctor and Mrs. Gragg a number started back down the steep path. C. Howe without a word to any one put back his easel with its inverted canvas, and the picture of Relief, locked the big doors of Myrick's barn and glided out of sight among the friendly pines.

CHAPTER XXXIV

There was very little business between trains at Waquanesett Station. The station-master, who was also baggage-master and telegraph operator, was taking his ease stretched out on a baggage truck where he could see a mile down the track, a straight mile of converging rails, of dwindling poles that supported a lofty barricade of wires, a mile of monotony carefully measured by four miles of transverse ties. There was no poetry, no romance, no inspiration in sight, and the station-master was nearly dozing.

"Oh, here you are! I want to send a telegram."

At sound of this the station-master sat up, and even put on his cap with the gold lettering and two gold buttons.

"Why, Rill! Dear me! I ain't seen you sense I dunno when."

"No, you ain't, an' if this goes an' gits back yer may not see me again fer as much more."

The old man opened the door into the tiny sanctum where he was wont to practise the awful mysteries of the Morse Code, and faced Relief Snow through the brass grating of a half grown window. He had on his spectacles and his official manner, and according to custom inquired: "Hev yer got it writ, or do yer want me to?"

She drew from some mysterious hiding-place a bit

of paper, and passed it in, under the protective grating. The station-master read it through slowly: then he looked up over the spectacles.

"So Joel went to Tacoma — I never thought so bad o' Joel as some on 'em."

Relief was growing fidgety; she hadn't come up here to talk over an affair that no one had been able to induce her to discuss even with the minister.

"'If you still mean what it says in the letter I will come right away. Relief,'" the old man read aloud, counting each word with his pencil. "That's fifteen words, Rill, an' the rate's awful high to Tacoma. You could cut it down by leavin' out the unnecessary words. Now see, yer could put it: 'If still mean what letter says will come right away.' That's ten words."

"But it don't sound the same. It ain't the way to answer a letter that's been waitin' for years."

"Like as not Joel's married by this time," the old man suggested. Relief ignored it, and getting out her pocket-book asked, "How much is it?"

"Another thing you ain't thought of," said the operator. "Don't yer want to add 'Answer'?"

"No — I thought o' that, but I left it out o' purpose. If he wants to answer he won't need no one to tell him."

"I'll send it flyin'," the station-master said, as he counted the money into the till. "It 'ud be an awful journey if you was to be sent for, Rill. I 'low it's most three thousand five hundred miles to Tacoma — further'n from here to Europe. Still — Joel done it." When she had gone he watched her disappearing down

the road. "Gawd!" he exclaimed. "I wisht I was forty years younger. Joel wouldn't git no sech beauty as Rill travellin' acrost no continent fer him!"

Back over the forty years handicap the station-master travelled in memory, searching for a face to compare with hers.

"Damn' if she ain't been kinder hankerin' all this time! An' folks callin' her cold-blooded! Women-folks! I ain't never heard a man say it!"

After that he went inside, and the little tapper began clicking out its conversation with a little tapper far away on the Pacific Coast, raking together the ashes of a fire that once had scorched the Cape Cod beauty, blowing upon them to see if any spark of life remained.

On the day when Miss Grayley had executed her manoeuvre in force against Conger had come the answer to Relief's message: "Always meant. Mean it now more than ever. Come quick. Anxiously waiting. Joel."

Relief had carried it up to her bedroom to read it calmly after the excitement caused by its arrival. Breakfast had been a little late, and they were just hurrying through at half past six. Cap'n Thoph was sousing half a doughnut in his second cup of coffee, and Ma and Mary M. had begun to clear the table when some one drove into the yard and knocked at the back door.

"Go see who it is, Rill," Mrs. Snow said, and Rill's heart jumped before her feet. If it should be the telegram! She hoped it wasn't. But it was, and the station-master explained at length how it had come

the night before, "but th' old hoss hed ben out on the flats an' was tired out; so I 'lowed the mornin' 'ud do."

"Thank you," Rill said, and crumpled it unopened in her hand.

"Ain't yer goin' ter open it?" he asked. "Yer know I took it down. Yer needn't be afraid, Rill."

"Thank you," she said again, and turned away.

"Queer critters, women an' gals," the station-master confided to his horse. "Give 'em what they want, an' they ain't no better satisfied than's if they didn't get it."

As Relief came back into the kitchen she heard her mother say, "It's her business, an' she's ben runnin' it uncommon well, I 'low."

The old man looked up from his drowning doughnut, but asked no questions, and Mary M., longing for excitement, buried her curiosity in sisterly affection, and washed her dishes.

Relief, sitting on the edge of her small bed, looked round the bare little room, at the stained window-shade that she could always turn into a picture of her mother chasing something with a broom; at the cracked pitcher and broken bowl on her washstand; at the mirror one half of which, owing to mercurial palsy, gave back no reflection; at the faded, worn carpet under one corner of which Joel's letter had lain since, a month after the awful disaster, he had written back from Tacoma begging her to marry him. It was a mean, sordid room, but it was home, her sanctuary. How much more cosy it was than she had ever before realized!

The telegram lay open in her lap. She had read it a dozen times. Joel meant it, had meant it from the first, wasn't simply willing to marry her because — because of that. His letter said that he loved her, and years had passed, but Joel hadn't married any one else. If she could only keep her mind on Joel, and not get to thinking about Myrick's and Him!

She put her finger in her mouth, using it as a pawl on a windlass, preventing the recoil, and the method succeeded so far that presently she was on her feet, had emptied her bureau and the old wardrobe of her scanty stock of clothes, and was packing furiously, in feverish haste, and the tears unheeded followed one another down her cheeks and were packed with the clothes.

Suddenly she stopped, went to the head of the stairs and called, "Mother!" Mrs. Snow exchanged with Mary M. coinciding opinions (uttered without speech) to the effect that Rill had been crying, and Mrs. Snow panted up the steep back-stairs. Relief shut the door; the two women sat side by side on the bed, and the mother held her daughter's hand in hers. Relief gave her the telegram and, by reason of tears in her eyes, and her spectacles left on the kitchen table, she couldn't see, and Relief had to read it aloud.

"I'm goin', Ma — to-day — afternoon train. I've got money enough to get out there, money he's paid me. An', Ma, I didn't want any mistake made about him."

"You mean — down to Myrick's, Rill, dear?"

Relief nodded. "He ain't like other folks. He's learnt me more than ever I knew. Seems like he was

one o' them magnifyin' glasses. I've seen so much through him that I didn't know was there."

A long silence followed. Rill's mind, in spite of that pawl, had flown back to the studio. The mother, holding fast a daughter whom she could never hope to see again, had gone back to the days of a rosy baby that loved to be cuddled, and a tiny hand pressing her breast.

"Ma, I'm goin' ter be very happy with Joel," Relief said, at last.

"I know it, dear; I know it," her mother said, and kissed her.

The packing was soon finished — so few clothes — and of treasures there were the Holy Bible her father gave her when she was eighteen, a few story-books, a celluloid paper-cutter she got at a church fair, but best of all a picture of herself painted by him, and so big it would hardly go in her trunk.

On top of all went the sacred purple dress. He had said he liked it, only he liked her best in the checked gingham. It was easy, in a way, to hurry through the farewells with father and Gene, harder far when it came to Mary M., and heartbreaking to tear herself from mother. But it was done at last. She and the old trunk lashed with a couple of fathoms of clothes-line were stowed in the "deepo" wagon; there was one last look at the old place, at father who looked old, and Gene pretending to be busy in the woodshed, and Mary M. and Ma who had their arms round each other.

And while Relief Snow was breaking away from the old life without trusting herself to say good-by to

the man she held in reverence, Bess Grayley's party grouped in front of Myrick's were looking from Relief Snow's likeness to the signature beneath it.

The cat came out from the kitchen and rubbed against the door-jamb, holding her tail very high and humping her back. That was Relief's last sight as the wagon turned the corner, and she faced the long journey towards Tacoma and the new life and the waiting Joel.

CHAPTER XXXV

They had gone, every one, not chatting gaily as when they came toiling up the path; silently, or whispering softly, for they were leaving tragedy behind them on the cliff. Conger Howe had been popular with young and old; despite his reticence there lurked at the corners of his eyes a spirit that led children to make friends with him. And they were sorry, now, that they had come. Those who whispered were offering excuses based upon his lack of training as a child. Only Bess was pleased, and her enjoyment of victory was marred when she overheard the doctor saying to Mrs. Gragg that somehow it made him think of Judas.

Barbara was left alone. Unconsciously she had resumed the seat and the attitude in which she had spent the afternoon. Once more her thoughts carried her back to that air castle, now a ruin; then to C. Howe and what the future held in store for him. How different her judgment as to that future from what she had pictured it an hour ago! And they had all turned against him now that they had seen — but had Mrs. Gragg and Dr. Doon turned against him, however great his offence? She could not believe that. They loved him, and love, such love as men feel towards each other, could pardon and find some sort of excuse for worse than that.

"What is my own position?" she asked herself. "Do I love him less than they?"

Then she fell to wondering where he was, why he didn't stay to talk it over with her. It was not fear at least. No one could say he was afraid or ever had been afraid — of anything.

Over in the west the sun was dropping, bright red; a bat, the earliest riser in his family, ventured forth, and hovered blindly, squeaking to his mate. In the nearest pine a katydid kicked his loud protest against the sultry heat, and dinned with his incessant dee! dee! dee!

The girl still sat there motionless and leaned her head against the friendly boards. Somehow, the more she thought the more her own life became involved in his. And he was going away — but not to Paris now. He never could — but he would go, all the sooner because of this. And she would never see him again. He might go back to China where no one knew or cared about the French school or the name taken in vain.

"How could he? How could he?" she repeated, and then before her eyes was the image of the man who had stood there painting her. Was that the image of a contemptible man? She tried to plan her life, with Conger quite left out. An icy premonition warned her that he had gone already, that she would never look upon his face again.

One by one the stars came out; a thousand insects trilled and chirped, calling to each other, and very far away a dog was barking. By the faint light she could

make out the careless footprints that profaned the little grave. She found a stick, and by its aid repaired the damage, heaping the soft earth once more into a decent mound.

On her knees in the gathering darkness life seemed something different from what she had ever known before. Almost, she thought, as though this were the end of it; and she had been thinking it the beginning, had not yet come to the point where she regarded herself as grown up. "But I have lived and loved and lost," she pondered, then checking herself. "But have I loved, as other women love?" And as she tried to answer her own question, not once did Galton come into her thoughts. It was Conger's image that occupied her wholly, his deep eyes that seemed to be searching hers for the answer. If only this hideous revelation of Bess Grayley's could have been postponed for a few days!

"I haven't loved because I cannot love," she concluded, peering out into the darkness, half conscious of a sound, the faint rhythmic thud of footsteps, or it might be the tapping of a branch of the nearest pine as it brushed the back of the old barn. She was too busily absorbed in her own problem to question which it was. Faithful to the North Star, the Big Dipper hung suspended over the bay; it was tipped at a very friendly angle for a thirsty child to drink from it, and Barbara was thirsty, a child once more in her longing for some one to take the responsibility and care. Her hand rested fondly on the little grave.

"Poor old dog," she murmured, "you never even had a name!"

"Neither did I," said a voice behind her.

"Conger!" her lips exclaimed. "I had thought you were gone."

"In panic-stricken flight?" he asked. "That would be too great a triumph for Bess. But did you never think that I gave the dog no name because I never had one? Hsiao, meaning: 'little one,' spelt in English is C. Howe. Neither is more than a nickname."

She saw that he wanted to avoid discussion of the afternoon's disclosure. They need not mention it; they could ignore it in the short time they might still have together.

"You didn't tell me," she said, "what you had decided was the legitimate end and aim of life."

"I remember," he answered, "we had just come to that. And I was going to say that I had lived long enough to discover that the object was happiness — not mere pleasure, of course, but happiness. Emperors would crush the idea, dogmatists deride it, egoists scoff at it, and priests abhor it, but, if it is true, it will live in spite of them."

"And you expect to find it — in Paris?"

"One never knows where or when, only as your Scripture says: 'Seek and ye shall find, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' I believe there is much wisdom in that."

"Happiness!" She spoke only the one word, and

shivered, but it was not from cold. Some wild fancy prompted her even then to ask, "And if all the world were open to you, where would you seek it first?"

"On this very spot," he declared, "and now."

She had risen to her feet, and was glad she had thought to repair the damage to the little grave before he could see it.

"There is real happiness only where love is," he went on. "Without it I cannot imagine happiness."

"And now more than ever you will need — some one who really cares." She was thinking of his downfall, what it would mean to him morally, financially, physically. He had never before seemed so much in need of love. An accusing voice within her was saying: "Why do you fight against it? He needs you." She was glad of the darkness that hid the rush of color which she could feel even in her eyes, for he still thought her interest quite impersonal. It seemed to her that some power outside herself was taking charge of this interview, rushing her headlong into utterances such as she would despise from any one else. He was going away, that was the all important fact and explanation. A few minutes since she believed he had gone. But he had come back to where they had spent the afternoon, and now she knew that all along she had wanted him to come back, had half believed he would. And why did she want him? she asked herself. Was more than one answer possible?

"I should hate to think I didn't love him when he was strong, and that now, because he is weak, I can change." So she reasoned with herself, and he, never

suspecting such a possibility, was silent, leaving it all to her. After what had happened he might as well hasten his departure. To her sympathetic nature it was doubtless doubly hard to play the part forced upon her.

"Perhaps because of the changed conditions he will be too proud to accept — what I can give him," she thought, trying to fathom him — it would have been so much easier in daylight watching those deep eyes.

"I want you to be happy, Conger!" Her voice trembled in her earnestness, and she never even heeded it; there was none but Conger to hear it. She stretched out her hands to him, and he took them in his without a word.

Galton had taken her hands; it had left her quite unmoved. Now her heart was racing. He must never let them go! But he would, because she had misled him.

"Conger!" she whispered. "Take me — in your arms — I want you to love me — I want to be a part of your happiness."

"Why — Barbara!" That was all he said.

A long time they had been sitting on the old bench, her head leaned not against the friendly boards but his friendlier shoulder; he too happy for words, the afternoon quite forgotten in this exquisite joy, she burying the horrid memory beneath the great new overwhelming tide of her love.

"Why is the bell tolling?" she asked, breaking the spell at last.

"It is only striking twelve," he said, "but hark!"

A voice a long way off was calling, "Bar-ba-ra!"
And Conger calling back answered it, "Here — at —
Myrick's!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

"They are coming for you," Conger said, resuming his seat, resuming also the charge of that brown head against his shoulder. "But they need not hurry now."

"Have I been horribly bold?" she asked, looking up in his face which she could only dimly see. "You know I virtually offered myself to you."

Suddenly she felt the shoulder and the strong protecting arm grow tense.

"Have you," he spoke nervously, anxiously: "have you done this thing from the motive of pity? I had not thought of this phase of it."

"It may have been," she answered fearlessly, "that what prompted me in the beginning was the belief that you had need of — love. But whatever it was, it discovered to me the fact that I, who didn't know what love was, was in love with you. And if you need me, as I hope you do, I need you a thousand times more."

Nothing, during the hours they had sat there, had been said of the afternoon, Bess's triumph. Now they were coming to break in upon this heavenly calm.

"Is there, perhaps, something you would wish to ask me before they come?" he suggested, and she in the panoply of a new confidence only shook her head, and answered: "No, nothing!" She would not

wound him by seeming distrust. It must be that in his own heart he found an excuse for what he had done. That should satisfy her, for the present, at least.

"So!" he answered, and she knew he was satisfied with her decision, that when the time came he, himself, would explain his point of view and willingly discuss it with her. She wasn't afraid to wait though it was the severest possible test of her faith in him.

"How can it be midnight?" she whispered, "No wonder the family were disturbed. But at first—I couldn't go from here, and then—then you came and I wouldn't go—not for all the families in the world!"

The voices had come very near, and with them the bobbing lights of half a dozen lanterns, and Galton Gragg's voice was heard saying: "I know it was Conger, so she's all right."

The searchers came, and found them sitting there on the old bench. Barbara's father led them, his anxiety suddenly turned to petulance that he should have been "put to so much trouble for nothing, and your poor mother worried to death for fear you were lost, and here you are simply—." At this point his extended hands had to finish the sentence with a gesture indicative of emptiness.

"Father, dear," Barbara protested, "don't act as if you were sorry no harm had come to me."

Galton alone seemed able to take in the situation at a glance; ignoring his companions he made straight for Conger. Holding up his lantern that he might see his friend's eyes. "At last," he said, speaking so that only those two could hear him, "the impossible has

happened to Barbara — and all because she felt that you needed her. Isn't it so, Barbara?"

It was their first real interview since the broken engagement, and she had dreaded the reproach of this masterful man, was quite unprepared for this sort of loyalty. It almost seemed that he had known her better than she knew herself. Galton and Conger, two friends whom this supreme test could not estrange, friends because they admired each other, trusted each other, and had much in common besides the love for this woman — Galton and Conger, their hands united in a grasp that spoke plainer than any words, read by the light of Galton's lantern all the story; one the story of Barbara's surrender, the other how a man can understand, and understanding, yield without bitterness.

"But what is all this stupid gossip about Félix Étron," Galton asked.

"Surely you understand," Conger answered steadily, looking into his friend's eyes, "surely you need not to ask. I am Félix Étron. It is but my Paris name. In Peking Hsiao; in Boston C. Howe; in Paris Félix Étron."

"And the silly Bess thought she had trapped you — you, the guileless —"

"Don't!" Barbara exclaimed, "I should hate myself for being stupid enough also to have believed it — but it was that — his need of some one — that showed me my own heart. Why — what becomes of M. Beauchamp?"

"He is of the Latin temperament — that is enough!" Conger explained, and Barbara:

“Haven’t I declared all along that if Félix Étron were not eighty, and would have me, I would marry him?”

THE END

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